THE ALIENATED CROWN.

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I.

THE ALIENATED CROWN.

"Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."
—REVELATION iii. 11.

THE late Dean Alford, followed by one or two more recent commentators, says that this exhortation is intended to mean 'Keep a firm grip upon your faith, and do not let it be wrested away by evil men. In taking away your faith, they will despoil you of faith's immortal crown. The persecutors of the Church would fain snatch from the brows of the elect the sign of spiritual royalty, and trample it in the dust.' Perhaps the older interpretation of the text, which is replete with soul-moving suggestiveness, is to be preferred. 'Do not despise the gains already reached, or become slack in Christian service, lest another outstrip you in the race. Never suffer the crown made ready in the counsels of God's eternal love to pass, by reason of your languor and unwatchfulness, into the possession of those who prove themselves worthier in character and service. Endure so that the first promise of religious life may be realised. To the last step of your course be strenuous and

unfaltering.' The exhortation seems to adopt and spiritualise the idea underlying Samuel's word to Saul concerning the rending of the kingdom out of his hands, and its being given to a neighbour who was better than he.

The interpretation which suggests that the honour forfeited through unfaithfulness may be transferred to some more worthy competitor, commends itself to us for two reasons. To assume that the believer's crown may be snatched away by the violence of the adversary, is contrary to the spirit of the New Testament language on this and kindred subjects. Indeed the Church of Philadelphia was exempt from the oppression of the persecutor and was to continue so. The rage of the adversary, moreover, counts for little or nothing against the spiritual interests of disciples, less indeed than the insidious temptations of the world. "No man shall pluck them out of My hand." "No man shall pluck them out of My Father's hand." And if violence avails nothing against the disciples' inward life, as that life is daily entrusted to the Redeemer's hands, violence is equally impotent against the believer's crown. The mere crown is not the object coveted by the adversary, for the treasure would lose its worth in alien hands. The assailant could no more profit by his spoil than the receiver of a stolen Koh-i-noor. Such jewels cannot be worn in either temporal or eternal kingdoms.

In favour of this older interpretation, we have also

the significant teaching of Christ's own parables. The unremunerative pound of the slothful servant is not put into the melting pot, cast into the sea, or claimed for himself again by the lord who gave it. It is reapportioned, so as to add to the munificent recompense of the one who was conspicuously diligent and faithful. So with the buried talent, which might have done so much for the fortunes of the man on whom it was first bestowed. It is not taken back into the treasury, or added to the private capital of the original owner, but it is given as a bonus to the most worthy and capable man of the group.

Each church and each separate disciple has a distinctive vocation, and, in the counsels of God, a specific and unmistakable prize associates itself with the faithful fulfilment of that vocation. There are crowns of honour in heaven, corresponding to every possibility of character and every opportunity of service upon earth. Thrones upon the right and left hand of the Redeeming King are made ready for those who drink His cup and enter into His baptism. James and John, perhaps, missed them, and the honours which belonged to their high positions passed, it may be, to the women who watched at the cross. God counts up all that is due, from those who receive grace, privilege, golden occasions, defining and determining beforehand the recompense which befits the diligent use of these things. He draws unerring lines about our destiny, upper lines representing the maximum to be expected from us, lower

lines representing the minimum to be attained, if we are to escape His last condemnation. Honour is already assigned to us consonant with the highest possibilities of our lives, and dimmer and less splendid honour is written down for us in God's book if we merely rise to the least which may be fairly expected from us.

The possibilities symbolised by celestial crowns are no tenuous day-dreams, for if we are in grace we have set out towards their accomplishment. We possess an experience through fidelity to which we rise to all the glory God has destined for us, and the loss of which entails a lowered standing-place in the kingdom of heaven. Men sometimes deride experience, and speak of the ultimate issues of religious life as vague conjecture. But we hold even now the clue to all excellence and perfection, and by keeping a firm grip upon attainments of which we are already conscious, the celestial honours stretched out by God's hand will become sure possessions.

The fact that the crown lost by one passes to another, brings to mind *the good faith of God and the largeness of His plans.* So imperatively benign are the Divine purposes, that there can be no diminution in their scope. The Lord will never take back what He has once resolved to give for the blessing and enrichment of His people. Prizes are sometimes promised that are not awarded; the reason alleged is that no one reaches a sufficiently high standard of excellence in that particular year. Dis-

appointed candidates, of course, suspect the good faith of the judges, or the unreserved generosity of the donors. But God never lays Himself open to whispers of mistrust. What He once gives He gives for ever; and if it is not won by us, it will be reserved for others. Whilst there is no predestination of the individual, or of individual conduct, there is a fore-appointed honour for humanity as a whole, the length, breadth, depth, and height of which are measured and determined by eternal counsels. God's grand, age-long purpose concerning men can never shrink into even partial frustration. If I am unworthy of my appointed crown, it shall not drop from the firmament like the winged meteor of a second, but shall pass into the possession of one worthier than I have proved myself. The banquet must be filled from the highways and hedges, if princes and courtiers absent themselves. The king cannot risk disparagement of his counsels, and an apparent compromise of his goodness, by countermanding what he has once made ready for his guests. The faith of the creation in the endless beneficence of God would be disturbed if He could be seen dismantling palaces, shattering thrones, blotting out crowns designed for those who afterwards fell short in their faith and life. If Israel is destroyed, the descendants of Moses must be consolidated into a great nation. The precious things in the Divine treasury must be kept for unborn nations when His people prove faithless.

Valuables to which there is no title go by the law of our country to the Crown. Not so in the kingdom of heaven. God waits till some one can make good a title by heroic acts. The crown may be alienated from the one who was once designated to be its wearer, but God will hereafter call and qualify a man fit for its ennoblement.

This exhortation implies that *the partial and temporary failure of the individual does not imply the final failure of the race.* If God were to revoke the promised crowns because of the unfitness of those for whom they were first designed, it would imply His own despair of our poor, frail nature. When God shows distrust of the promise and possibility of the race, who would dare to hope and toil for its betterment? Would it not become the forlorn and unsheltered Cain in the hierarchies of intelligent life? But God never does despair, and stretches out crowns to the oncoming ranks where the foremost have failed. The instructed husbandman watches for years over some choice fruit stock that is slow to bear. He has faith in its inherent qualities, for he knows the rare forms of life that have been blended into it. The seasons come and go, leaving him without a single misgiving. He knows that if it does not bear its diadem of blossom and glow with rich fruit this year, it will the next, or the year after that, or at least within another decade. He is not tormented if the first fruits fail to win the coveted prize. Useless growths must be cut away. There

is no abatement in the careful nurture, for he is persuaded that rare secrets are hidden there. The barren cells must make way for others; that is all. And does not God look at humanity in some such way as this? He knows that His Son has become the very root of it, blending the virtues of His own holy person with its acrid and loveless life, and that the crowned Saviour will yet be surrounded by crowned disciples, fit for their high distinctions. Rare fruit will surely appear; and the honours still proffered to stimulate our endeavour, are a sign that God never loses faith in our possibilities. If you and I have not yet risen to the high vantage-ground of our vocation, before long some one will reach it. If we do not achieve the majestic work Divine Providence has made ready to our hand, it shall be done by toilers of greater diligence and finer consecration. If we are unmeet for the supreme reward, His Spirit is fitting some one upon whom, in the end, the reward can be appropriately bestowed. God could not impoverish His universe by quenching the splendours of the crowns laid up for His valiant ones. Brother or neighbour, child or dependant, may step into the priceless opportunity, if you fail to improve it, but the opportunity shall not be lost to the race.

I. *We need to concern ourselves first of all with the personal significance of these words*, although they were addressed to the representative of a Church, and have a collective application. Many incidents of the Scriptures illustrate and enforce

them. Great in character as was Moses, and invested with enduring honour, he failed to attain all the glory it was God's will to put upon him. No higher opportunities ever came to any of the religious leaders of the world than were put within reach of this shepherd prince. His name stands apart upon the roll of Jewish saints; but the fame of leading the twelve tribes to their settlement in the Land of Promise, through a series of striking and heroic exploits, belongs to Joshua. The hero of the Exodus forfeited that splendid consummation to his career by an outbreak of rash, unbridled irreverent temper. He smote the rock twice—smote it the second time in anger and unbelief, so bringing a stain of dimness upon long years of meekness, devotion, and humble unwavering trust in God. He did not lift up holy hands without wrath and doubting, and by a moment of unwatchfulness lost the crown he might have worn, not only as the law-giver, but as the founder of the Jewish Commonwealth. He reminds us of many a man who does brilliant and priceless work in the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and then blotches the record of honourable years by disastrous rage and overbearing pride. The minister of the word or the zealous and unselfish worker in the Church prospers wondrously, turning many to righteousness, and bidding fair to become a star of the first magnitude; but the service is overshadowed for a time, and an inevitable privation detracts from the fulness of reward. Such men, it

may be, still shine as the stars, for God is merciful, and never forgets the service rendered to His cause; but not as stars of the first magnitude, since the supreme crown has been lost. Their recompense in the resurrection of the just is vast, but might have been vaster, for they failed to realise the ideal possibilities of their work and position.

The lesson comes home to us again as we read the history of David. How high his throne would have stood, and how resplendent his crown, had he been uniformly faithful and obedient. His transgression tended to taint the atmosphere breathed by his contemporaries; and his wars, moreover, were not all inevitable, nor were they conducted in the spirit of an irreproachable humanity. The sins arising from his moral slackness kept him back from building the temple in which his own psalms were to be sung for centuries. That crown of honour was worn by his successor, inferior in many qualities, but at least a man of peace. The father might have united a perfect circle of honours in his own person, and have been the one commanding figure of sacred history.

And in the New Testament we find yet more striking and tragic illustrations. Judas was one whose crown was taken by a worthier disciple. His call to the apostleship was as genuine as that of Peter. We cannot think that in the earlier days of his association with Jesus, this man's character was destitute of every trace of promise. In the springtide of his career he had capacity, resource, spells of

enthusiasm, and unselfishness. He might have filled, after Christ's departure, some noble field of missionary enterprise. The future was before him, and it was not impossible for him to become the immortal evangelist of one of the great countries of the East. There was an ideal possibility in the life, afterwards, alas! frustrated, a crown laid up in heaven which was the complement of that possibility. The prize was shining over his pathway—the awaiting recompense of a faithful, self-denying, and heroic apostleship. But the first grace was suffered to slip, the early simplicity sophisticated by worldliness, the promise nipped by avarice. Not one of the twelve thrones of which Jesus had spoken could remain vacant. His lost crown passed, shall we say, to Matthias, or to Paul? The splendour wreathed about the brow of the converted inquisitor might have rested upon the man known to all history as a traitor and suicide. The crown was taken by another, and the faithless apostle, cast forth from his inheritance and disrobed, was left to welter in pain and eternal shame.

The loss is not so irreparable in every case as in that of Judas. The soul may sometimes be saved, and the crown missed; or, to borrow the language of the Epistle to the Corinthians, "a man's work may be destroyed," and yet he himself may be "saved as by fire." Have we realised our first promise? Is not the crown prepared for us, like the crown and kingdom of Saul, in danger of passing to a neighbour

better than ourselves? It is well we should be provoked to just jealousy if we are sinking into ignoble stupor and disobedience. Emulation in certain stages of our history may be a motive for religious strenuousness.

The promise of great things hides itself in lives which, to the outward eye, are unpromising, meagre, poverty-stricken. God could not create men to put before them from the beginning the prospect of a crownless immortality. The first settlers at the Diamond Fields made it a punishable offence for a native to be found in possession of a diamond. There are no such restrictions in God's domain. The pariah may be found at last with the gracious adorning for which princes prove themselves unfit. Noble treasures are open for the quest of the lowly. In every life there is an earnest of piety, and the dawning years are never without a gleam of promise. Let children keep their innocence, for they do not need to enter upon courses of open sin, so that they may have the grace of effectual conversion. It is possible to wear the double crown of a child's innocence and a believer's sanctity, like a twin rainbow about the head. Possibly the preacher may be speaking to some from whose mind both hopes have fled. There was a time when the grace of conversion was sensibly near. You were not far from the kingdom, but you lost reverence for sacred things. The crown of saintship you just missed. God meant to have you for one of His bosom friends,

but you have become a second-rate citizen. Your doom is not foreclosed, but life cannot now be made as honourable as it might have been. You have lost that which will never alight within your reach again. There are those who miss their crowns and yet the last threat is not fulfilled, for their names are not blotted out of the book of life. Opportunities are left that may be redeemed, yet opportunities of diminishing value and significance.

Was there not a time in your history when the call to pre-eminent sanctity came with impressive emphasis and inspiration? For days, perhaps weeks or months, the life you were strengthened to live was blameless, heroic, consecrated, judged at least from the standpoint of knowledge then attained. Your consciousness of providential work grew into singular distinctness. How practicable the sublime aspirations seemed! The crown was at hand. But ere long the vast, hungry, storm-fouled tides of worldly care broke in, and, like a torrent tearing down all restraints, buried from view the fair achievements of the past. The submerged projects come back in twilight dreams. Holy voices chime from the long ago and its ruined promise, like the note of bells once hung well up towards heaven in a tower since fallen. Another whose religious spirit was scarcely so intense as yours has surpassed you. The crown that was to recompense a life of faultless love, is ravished away by invisible hands, and glitters over the goal to which another's pathway leads; or,

like a strange star, has passed out of view, and joined itself to the constellations of an unknown firmament.

The child in the home should be the crown and the rejoicing of his own parents in the day of Jesus Christ. It is in the providential order that mothers and fathers should be the chief instruments in the spiritual salvation of their own little ones. But how many are content that the teacher in the Sunday school, the minister of religion, a devout neighbour, should wear the crown rather than those for whom it was first made ready. Rousseau, it is said, dropped the successive children who were born to him into the boxes of the Paris Foundling Houses, and left them to the custody of the community. And people sometimes do with the immortal souls of their children what Rousseau did with their bodies. They are not rich enough in spiritual life and experience to teach their own offspring, so they surrender them to the Sunday school, to the Church and its praiseworthy movements for helping the young, or even to the priest, whom some regard as the only pious person in the land competent to give religious instruction. It is criminal in us so to live that we are spiritually disqualified from being the guides and saviours of our own children. Surely it must be a pain in heaven for a father or mother to think that another has been a greater benefactor to my child than I have proved, and that there is a foster fatherhood or motherhood in spiritual things which surpasses in its sacredness the tie of common blood

between me and my offspring. Another wears the crown of my child's salvation, for the zeal of his teacher surpassed my own, and created a deeper debt of love.

Did not some of us in the days of our youth give the promise of an eminent usefulness we have since failed to realise? Our quick, unsophisticated sympathies, our unstaled enthusiasms, our childlike faith, seemed to clothe us with the fascination of high moral authority in dealing with human souls. A success came to us that was sweet to our purest tastes. In its opening stages our career bade fair to be a pathway of evangelical conquest, shining unto the perfect day. We were learning the wisdom which turns many to righteousness, and shines at last as the stars. Others then promised less, but they more than surpass us now. We have settled down into a non-aggressive, self-contained, unoffending kind of religion, the assertion of whose truths must wait upon circumstances. Perhaps we were called to heroic and unselfish service in posts of danger and hardship, to high places of the field, where honours were not far to seek or long to wait for. A voice summoned to great sacrifices, and through many steps in our opening life we gave heed to the voice. But a strain of the world's calculating temper has come to us with years of vexation and disillusionment. We insist upon the duties we owe to ourselves, or claim a meed of human praise for our sacrifices. Our career has

dropped to lower levels. The crown meant for us is passing to more royal souls.

II. *This solemn warning reminds us of our national perils, as well as of the losses which sometimes threaten us in our life of individual piety and service.* We think of the crown of distinction providentially prepared for the Jewish race, a crown that after fifteen centuries of possession has passed to others. What an incomparable honour it was to occupy this conspicuous place as the elect people of God, and to be standing on the threshold of yet higher power and renown! The man who, from the secular standpoint only, studies the history of religious life and literature, is compelled to recognise the pre-eminence of the Hebrew race. Who of us would not rather have had the glory of leading Israel out of Egypt than that of being conqueror at Marathon? Has not the tuneful shepherd, whose faith sang itself into the sweet numbers of the twenty-third Psalm, a higher place in the reverence of Christendom, than the Greek minstrel who arranged the rude traditions of his age into the music of Homer's *Iliad?* He who wrote the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, or the prayer of Habakkuk, has a more illustrious place amongst the immortals, than he whose hand chiselled the world's priceless marbles, or painted the masterpieces that have thrilled men with a new sense of beauty. The royal attributes of the Hebrew race in the times of its truth and fidelity to God were such as none could mistake. But higher honour than this fell to its lot, for the

children of Abraham were to be the guardians of Messiah's cradle. For a brief space the Crown Prince of Heaven was a guest in many a common Syrian home. But another page of history has been turned, and for eighteen centuries the Jewish race has done little besides producing a Spinoza, a Heine, a Beaconsfield, and a few clans of successful bankers and gold and diamond mine-owners; and in some cases the old faith was abjured before eminence in philosophy, criticism, statecraft, and millionaire dictatorship was reached. The highest glory of the Jewish race has passed for a time to other races. A brand too often rests where once the crown shone. The kingdom of God has been taken from them and given to peoples bringing forth the fruits thereof. Other nations now wear the diadems which once decked the elect descendants of Abraham. The crown has not perished, but it has been alienated, and its princely splendours have been put upon others.

And these vicissitudes have repeated themselves from time to time in the history of the Gentile races. Peoples anointed to power and crowned with favour in earlier generations, are now despoiled, desolate, discrowned. The glory of the Churches of Asia Minor has waned and sunk into eclipse. The warning to this very Church of Philadelphia has been fulfilled, and communities addressed in the inspired epistles of St Paul, and honoured with the ripe, wise, soul-cherishing ministry of the beloved disciple, are no more. Their honour has departed, but not into

thick midnight. It has become an aureole encircling with Divine approval new and more vital churches. The Moslem reigns in the madness of lust and bloodshed where these churches once blossomed as the lily and cast forth their roots as Lebanon. The renown of the Churches of Northern Africa, once the homes of faith and Christian learning, has paled and is all but quenched. Christian communities of ancient lineage still survive there, but in straitened and degenerate conditions, and their influence is less than dust in the counsels of Christendom. And it is so also in some degree with the Latin Church, although it does not become us to look upon it as sick unto death and incapable of revived faith. Its honour and authority were not eternal, and no orders, however august and unimpeachable, could make them so. The Papacy became the legatee of Cæsar's crown, and grasping that with an over-eager ambition, let slip a crown of higher preciousness that God had made ready. It is now bereft of both. It has been said, "The Church sent its dogmas into the provinces and conquered them, as Pagan Rome had once subdued them with its legions." But the dogmas derived much of their momentum from the power of this world, and the crown is so tarnished that it seems akin to a perishable bauble. In that vast community, which counts its adherents in every land, it is not possible to find the freedom, the humility, the tenderness of the primitive faith; and the great and venerable Latin Church, in its corporate life at least, has

bartered away the honours which attach to high spiritual attributes. It has not amongst its chief ministers the self-emptying spirit of Jesus Christ, and we must seek elsewhere for those who are the joint-heirs of His exaltation. Its distinction has passed to reformed churches. And even here it sometimes seems to be a question how long the distinction will be kept. With their growth in outward success, churches too often lose their simplicity and power. Divine Providence from time to time has to call into existence new and less stereotyped forms of organisation, to appeal to the world and to wear the highest crowns of the modern evangel.

Many signs seem to show that *the crown of honour England has worn as a Christian nation may pass to less luxurious peoples of simple creed and strenuous life.* It is impossible to contemplate, without a sad shrinking of heart, the idea that our free citizens are governed to a greater extent than they know by the representatives of demoralising trades. In far-off parts of the empire things are done even by Government officials which make us the butt of international scorn. Voluptuous Paris laughs at the gilded abominations of West End London. The cunning Oriental of light scruples finds something to wonder at in the adulterations and financial trickeries of our commerce and manufactures. At no small cost we have freed our slaves; but the coloured Coronation-guest who is driven through the streets of one of our large cities tells us, that the sights in our show-slums

are worse than in the blackest patch of savagery he knows. We have been lavish in our execration of the Legrees of the cotton plantation, and yet we suffer the sweater's lash to be laid upon tens of thousands of our own fellow-citizens. Neither in secular nor sacred knowledge are we likely to hold our front-rank position. We speak of our matchless philanthropies, of the missionary enterprises with which we girdle the globe. As an offset to our attempts to evangelise the heathen, we have Coronation banquets at which Indian princes are plied with drinks which are against the teaching of their own temperance religions, and made drunken. America, in spite of the blemishes upon her political and municipal life, leaves us far behind in the race of philanthropic enterprise and missionary organisation. Some of our own colonies set us an example in the treatment of vice and poverty, and in proportion to their resources, are doing more to purify and evangelise the world. The crown of honour seems not unlikely to pass from the mother-country to her children, unless we repent and re-establish our hold upon the first principles of freedom, morality, and religion. There are numbers in our midst who wish to make the empire Christian, but those in power are often superciliously indifferent to their aspirations.

Whilst the Christian communities in our midst have grown in intelligence and self-respect, *they are in danger of losing some of the high distinctions they once possessed as Christ's representatives to the people He*

seeks to befriend and save. If we are really making progress, there are drawbacks which discount our gains. Much of the work once undertaken by Christian organisations is passing into the hands of secular bodies. It was the joy and pride of the Church to watch over the poor, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked. Such charities are now relegated to boards not always Christian in their personnel. Now and again blameless Church members are found in our poor-houses, herding with those who have been taken there by improvidence and drink. The churches which permit such things have lost their crown and are clothed with shame. The honour of caring for the poor of the Lord Jesus has passed into the hands of men who represent the world of the grudging ratepayers. It may be said the sum of poverty in our midst is so appalling that the Church is incompetent to deal with it; but if we agree to stop the wanton manufacture of poverty, the inevitable residuum of misfortune will be well within our power to redress. The Church is not always proving itself the friend of all classes, except in a limited spiritual sense. The masses of the people turn for the help withheld by the Church to socialists, demagogues, and anarchists. Such men can never wear the forfeited crown, but many of the churches have surrendered their title to it, because they have become partisans of particular classes. There was a time when the Church was the educator of the few people who

received that blessing, but by sneering at the faith held by all followers of Christ in common, it shows a criminal lack of catholicity; and sooner or later education will need to be made secular, unless the arrogant ecclesiasticism in our midst can learn to change its tone. The older churches, as they acquire the respectability which attaches to a history and a pedigree, tend to become stiff, soulless, crystallised; and new communities need to be created to evangelise the masses. The crowns of the Church are lost, and pass to new communities and new generations.

Let us do our personal part to the uttermost. Only one life has fulfilled all its possibilities, and on the head of Him who lived it are many crowns. Let us improve all the possibilities still left to us.

II.

SUPPRESSED VOCATIONS.

"Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings."—1 THESSALONIANS v. 19.

THE several exhortations of these verses are links in a chain, and have a common relation to the work of the Spirit, whose light in ourselves, or in others, it behoves us never to quench. The prophecies we may be tempted to depreciate take their rise in His inspiration; it is by His methods of demonstration we must "prove all things"; and it is through the new instincts He elicits, and in virtue of the discriminations to which His ever-present ministry helps us, that we must "Hold fast that which is good," and "Abstain from every form of evil."

For the present, we will limit our attention to the first two clauses of this series. The words of our comrades in the faith, upon whom the Spirit of God rests, may be the channels through which visitations of light and sacred fervour are to reach us, and if we depreciate the gift of contemporary prophecy, the gracious influences which have come nigh unto us may be dispelled. This warning shows that the

apostle has in mind not only the sin of disobeying the Spirit, when he speaks directly to our consciences, but the no less grievous sin of disparaging inspirations which may be present in the utterances of those upon whom, for various reasons, we may be tempted to look down. By such tempers we not only deprive ourselves of guidance, counsel, and stimulation, sent from the presence of God, but we run the risk of turning out of the path of their vocations those whom God has called and empowered for peculiar service. To disparage and contemn those utterances of holy enthusiasm known as prophecy, is a significant sin against the ministry of Him who has come to make His perpetual abode in the Church.

And this warning is relevant also to the unfriendly attitude of mind we are sometimes tempted to show towards other spiritual endowments vouchsafed by the indwelling Spirit to His people. In the letter to the Corinthians, the apostle reminds his readers that the gifts bestowed upon the members of Christ's body assume manifold forms in harmony with the needs of the passing age, and the strains of temperament in those chosen to further the work of the kingdom. "All these worketh the one and selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will." A gift means a vocation, for the two things are inseparable. Each man in the Church has his own vocation, and when we treat that vocation with levity or superior disdain, our temper is sacrilegious, and

we risk the moral disaster involved in quenching the Spirit.

A man may disobey his own vocation, and trample under foot its prize; and others may also embarrass him as he is seeking to follow after it. There are prophets and teachers, pastors and evangelists, helpers and healers, who, keeping the body in subjection, stop short of becoming moral derelicts, but who leave blank spaces in their providential life-plan, and belie the anticipations of the spring-time. One of the saddest chapters in the chequered history of the Church is that which recites the tragedy of suppressed vocations—a chapter, alas! still unfinished. A suppressed vocation involves an arrest of benign purifying revival within the Church, and a humiliating postponement of God's merciful purpose towards the world.

This peril is perhaps the greatest where religious interest is widespread, and the number of those fit for wise fruitful service tends to multiply. In apostolic times the gift of prophesying seems to have been common in Corinth and Thessalonica, centres touched by Greek culture, where facility of speech was a prevailing accomplishment; and also in the Church at Jerusalem, where for centuries the discussion of religion had been a popular custom, the Spirit had bestowed the gift of tongues. But whatever the measure of preparation, when the Spirit was given, new capacities for service appeared. If churches are dead as the withered veldt, there is

perhaps little or no danger lest the gift of prophesying should be despised, and the vocation of the disciple hindered. The congregations in which men gather as spectators of a religious drama, or to regale themselves with ravishing music, rather than as active participators in the work and worship of God's house, may account such an admonition as this irrelevant. But so surely as the Spirit comes down upon the multitudes, hidden aptitudes for service show themselves, and the sense of spiritual vocation takes possession of many minds. Wherever the reviving breath of God is felt, gifts appear with strange profusion, and every true disciple finds within himself a great impulse towards service. Let us see to it that we have no hand in spoiling a possible apostle, an incipient missioner, an ungrown evangelist, one whom God is calling to the task of healing the world's woe, dispelling its fatal darkness, and binding up its heartbreak. The man who hinders the vocation of another wrongs the world of its best riches, and the loss may not be soon repaired.

In a chapter entitled "The Easiness of Salvation," that most winsome of Roman Catholic writers, F. W. Faber, says: "It is wonderful that a man can be graciously visited by the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, that he can feel fully assured in his own mind that such and such practices and self-denials are the will of God in his own case, and yet be also sure that those inspirations are not intended as a law, and that resistance of them therefore is not

sin." This passage is perhaps intended to imply the inferior authority of private inspirations. The saintly hymn-writer and theologian might have attached greater significance to these Divine movements within the soul if the Church had confirmed and authenticated them by its august authority, and had formally put its approving seal upon the vocations to which these mystic visitations impelled. But surely the voice of the Spirit within us is as sacred and authoritative as any formulated precept of the Scriptures; for whenever the Spirit addresses Himself to those who are tractable to His teachings, it is to interpret the inwardness of the written law, and to broaden the applications to which it lends itself. Obligations of personal duty, the sense of which is kept alive within us by the breath of the ever-present God—obligations of service and ministration may be bound up with our common obligations to Decalogues and Sermons on the Mount, and may rank in importance with primary moral duties. In many cases obedience to the heavenly vision—and the vision may come in its own separate and distinct form to all classes of Christian workers — is vitally intertwined with loyalty to the outward precepts of the law; and to disobey the Spirit in such things is to separate ourselves from the source of sanctity, and to put far off its high possibilities. Many a man keeps right towards God only whilst he is heeding this secret call, and is docile to these subtle inspirations.

"Woe is me if I preach not the gospel," said the apostle, and if any man could have effectually hindered him in his vocation, the impious obstructionist would have shared the curse consuming the soul of a backsliding apostle. The sense of vocation may be just as strong in others as in the great apostle of the Gentiles, whether they fulfil separated ministries or not; and the peril of despising these gifts of the Spirit, and putting a stumbling-block in the pathway of Christ's disciple as he seeks to run the appointed course of his calling, is just as grave as in ancient times. To be inhospitable to the gifts of the Spirit in the Church is to slight the great Spirit Himself.

It is easy to see how vocations from God, in the case of those neither robust in disposition nor inured to hardness, may be straitened and perhaps nullified by the harsh, ungenial, inhibitory tempers of cavilling Christians. A man may fail morally, throw away rare gifts for ministration entrusted to him, and so cancel his own vocation; but it sometimes happens that one chosen, called, and qualified by the Spirit, may be so discouraged by the arrogance, frigidity, and cynical pessimism of others, that, without open delinquency of conduct on his own part, he fails in a stewardship which, at the beginning, had in it an earnest of great things. And this is almost sure to be the case if he is of a diffident and sensitive nature, and the chief instrument in his discouragement has qualities which enlist deference. As a

hinderer of vocations, the person who has prestige and standing in the Church is likely to do more mischief than one who is without reputation. By despising prophesyings, or any of the gifts bestowed from above for the edification and enlargement of the Church, of which prophesying is the type, we may tempt the man of God to think little of his own enduement, and bring his career to a decorous close. This deplorable result can scarcely fail to follow, where the recipient of the Pentecostal gift is of the feminine rather than of the masculine type of temperament. Apostate prophets, or at least prophets whose spiritual functions are in a state of suspended animation, may sometimes be brought to this evil pass by the ill-judged acts of others. Mismanaged, unspiritual, despotically administered churches often have to sustain, in God's searching and equitable judgment, some kind of responsibility for all the gifts which have become aborted within their borders.

A century and a half ago God called a group of men in the State Church of our country to the work of evangelists ; and by the Divine blessing the Anglo-Saxon race to-day owes many of its best qualities and its predominating influence in the world to their passionate appeals and their example of life and service. But within that Church itself there was little or no appreciation of their spiritual gifts, no sympathetic sense of their providential mission. Unholy jeering greeted their

immense toils and sacrifices. Their prophesyings were despised; the pulpits of the Church in which they had been ordained were closed against them, for no better reason than that men trembled and wept contrite tears at the power of their word, and organised themselves into associations for fellowship and prayer. These new apostles, notwithstanding their many and indubitable seals, were inhibited by bishops with a peremptoriness unknown in recent controversies, whilst their hearers were driven like pariah dogs from the sacramental tables of the Church in which they still desired to continue their membership. Perhaps it was the Church itself which chiefly suffered through its infatuated contempt for prophesyings. This at least became woefully weakened, and the penalty of its official folly is felt, if not acknowledged down to the present hour. But the world did not greatly lose; for these God-possessed men were strong in character, they could face polished sneers or unpolished brickbats with equal intrepidity, and their splendid successes nerved them with courage and fitness to endure in face of depreciation and contempt.

But imagine for a moment that such calls and inspirations had come to men of softer and more sensitive mould, men rich in the feminine attributes of character; and what, humanly speaking, would have been the issue? It is not every man with even a great and genuine vocation from God who could carry it on under such forbidding conditions;

for although a vocation implies corresponding gifts, it does not necessarily involve at the outset complete congruity of character. This has to be achieved step by step through the successive scenes encountered in the prosecution of a difficult and responsible commission. Melanchthon could not have done such work. The devout and refined hymnist of the Oxford movement might serve his generation according to the Divine will, contributing from his retreat in the placid village of Hursley memorable notes to the praise and worship of the universal Church. But if his vocation had been that of an evangelist, one can scarcely conceive that he would have faced mobs for fifty years, and kept a high heart within him when confronted by the frowns of his ecclesiastical superiors. The question of temperament apart, his veneration for the rulers of the Church would have compelled him to give up the unequal conflict. His gifts needed much human sympathy to make them thrive. It is conceivable that the Spirit may bestow upon men of tender and sensitive fibre special powers, and inwardly press them to work which must be done and yet which is sure to provoke opposition. It is more than conceivable; as a matter of fact it sometimes is so. And what is the too frequent result? They are stung into silence and disappear. They could meet without shrinking the virulence of the ungodly, but not the disfavour of those who profess and call themselves Christians. Their vocations have been belittled

and insidiously suppressed through the indifference and perhaps active discouragement of their official superiors. Prophesying has been despised, in some social areas the Spirit has been obscured if not quenched, and the world has become more grievously barren and sin-ravaged because their opening missions have been impeded. Men who in the days of their youth have clear and impressive calls and endowments, and fail in their subsequent response to the inward voice, must not always be looked upon as final castaways. They are saved as by fire, or saved into an inferior felicity. Through constitutional frailty, and unfitness for the double task of work and fight, they have come short; but they have been sacrificed to the obstinacy, ill-temper, and worldly policy of men more aggressive in tone, but less spiritual and unselfish than themselves. Some instincts are transient, and if not exercised when they are first felt, disappear. And that supernatural instinct for service which has its beginnings in an inward brooding of God's Spirit, and is akin to the sense of vocation, may be lost.

The gifts and callings of our fellow believers are often sterilised by the frigid censorious tempers which creep into Church-life. Criticism has important services to fulfil, for it tests principles, sifts out sagacious from unprofitable methods, tunes to more perfect music the speech through which men are swayed; but when criticism dominates the heart, and becomes a pitiless and gagging censorship, it works untold mischief. Is the incipient prophet well-bred,

correctly dressed, highly trained, broadened out with sufficient culture? Or is he raw in speech, uncouth in attire, deficient in the suave tact of the courtier? Sacred and precious enterprise has been bitten with black blight by the captious and unfriendly tempers it has sometimes had to encounter in the Church; and endowments for lofty service latent in unpretending circles of life have again and again been slighted. We have forgotten the axiom that in God's order "more abundant honour is bestowed upon the uncomely parts," "that there may be no schism in the body." It may be that we have been infected with Carlyle's distaste for expansive speech. Of course we should welcome a Pentecost, but the prophets of it must be Quietists or Carthusian monks. We affect to praise the everlasting silences, forgetting that such silences never achieved much, except as impressive pauses in the midst of speech, or as breathing-spaces to prepare for nobler testimony. We are such strong adherents of the philosophy of silence, at least as a counsel of perfection for others, that we may one day find ourselves yawning when a mighty prophet speaks. We frown on young people's guilds because they foster a premature loquacity in children, and tend to religious unreality. Although a child, Samuel did prophesy many, many generations ago, we are sceptical about any modern recurrence of the phenomenon, for the age of miracles is past. If a twentieth century child Samuel, at the bidding of the Most High, were to open his lips, at

least in such unpleasant messages as he of the olden days spake, we should perhaps call him a prig, and tell him to sit down and learn from his elders. We quite ignore the fact that a call to service comes to every man standing in the market-place, and whenever there is the willing heart, the fitting gift will not be wanting. We sort over the waiting labourers as an emigration officer might sort over the skinny and cadaverous natives in a coolie depot, and it is a small proportion only, out of the whole, that we adjudge fit for the work of the vineyard. If we had a broader and a more poignant sense of the need of the Master's work, a more specific pity for those who perish through lack of knowledge, a surer confidence in the resources of the Spirit who divides to every man severally as he will, we should make the call to service in the kingdom of God as wide as the Lord Himself made it. We check the ardour and enthusiasm of the young by reminding them that they have much to learn. We bid those who in their zeal for usefulness are straining under the artificial fetters placed upon them to practice the habit of patient waiting. We tell every man who thinks that he is prompted to take some part in God's work in the world that he must first know himself, which may need years, and human life in its many phases, which may need yet other years. And because in our excessive prudence we have despised prophesyings, and suspended our judgment for unconscionable periods before approving and encouraging the vocations of others, we have the

mixed satisfaction of looking upon a spectacle of abortive evangelism, spring-tide missioning without summer fruits from the show of blossom, nascent sons of consolation falling off into malcontents, under-shepherds to the lambs of Christ's flocks sleeping the promise of youth away in ignoble ease, unfolding faculties for service in the kingdom atrophied, and other and manifold signs of a huge tragedy of vocations smothered at their birth-hour. And for such deplorable results we must be held more or less accountable. The Church ought to be pervaded by an atmosphere of genial, growth-alluring sympathy, in which every gift can be matured to full perfection and fruitfulness. May we not, perhaps, have had some share in making it otherwise? Those into whom God is breathing the passion and the fitness for service do not always find that cordial, unstinted brotherly kindness which will help on the best that is in them. Perhaps we cannot see the Spirit's operations under the temporary disguise of grotesqueness, provincialism, zeal without knowledge.

Experts in scientific agriculture have been trying the effect of electricity upon seeds. It is said that it does not accelerate their growth or hasten on the term of ripening, but it greatly diminishes the proportion of sterile seeds. The gifts and callings of the Spirit ought not to work out upon the same scale as the law of waste in seeds. Every church is a storehouse of unknown aptitudes and endowments. Great apostleships may slumber in some of the

common-place souls around us, ungrown helpers of human need and healers of social sores are at our side, young men and maidens encircle us, in whom the Divine Spirit has already quickened the earnest and promise of fitness for the work the new century is bringing; and if we could only make our church life brotherly, electric, intensely stimulating, these dawning gifts and potencies would come to perfection in a far higher ratio than in the past. The heart-breaking tragedies of lapsed and effete vocations should not be of such monotonously frequent recurrence. We waste our Pentecosts, and the mystic baptisms with which they are fraught pass by, because we are so slow to read the signs of their nearness.

A temper of covert and unconfessed envy often leads men to disparage the gifts of others, and to put stumbling-blocks in the path of their enterprise. "Enviest thou for my sake?" asked Moses, when two men prophesied in the camp, and Joshua, the man of military discipline, urged that this defiant irregularity should be put down. Not every man who calls himself a follower of Jesus has attained the magnanimity of Moses the Hebrew. It is to be feared that the temper of an overweening clericalism often has its root-fibres in a very human soil. Envy is as hideous and schismatical when it masques as zeal for the honour and authority of the Church, as when it assumes no such sanctimonious disguise. Indeed, in some minds, the Church and the priest are so closely identified

that the personal and impersonal strains of this vice are inblent, and in the last honest analysis, the man who is jealous for the dignity of the Church is found to have a morbid sense of his own importance. Men would not be human unless they did love power, and the priest is as human as the rest of us. He cannot brook a rival. His authority would pass or would be greatly diminished if other voices besides his own, with new accents of prophecy and interpretation, were to be heard in God's house. And those of his bodyguard resent with acrimony the first faint suspicion of competing influence and knowledge. Lay agency is held to be an impertinence and a sacrilege in the courts of God's house, unless it confine itself either to surpliced psalmody on the one hand, or arid secularities on the other. It is a misnomer to speak of vocations to which men are not ordained by the imposition of hands, or for whose vows the Church is not an official sponsor.

But this temper of envy is not the monopoly of the man who wears the frock of a priest. Not one of us likes his work to be rivalled or surpassed, or even to be done by some other method than that which commends itself to us. That man seems to have the word "usurper" written upon every line of his face, who dares to come upon our domain and touch the work we have staked out for ourselves. He rushes our claim. We are tempted to look upon it as a personal affront if he outruns us in zeal, originality of method, active, compassionate service. The

gifts bestowed by a Spirit of infinite resource are sure to be diverse and many-sided; and when such is the case, the old Corinthian strife repeats itself, invidious distinctions are set up and pulled down, and many a man's supernatural endowment disappears in the scuffle. Wherever there is an outbreak of new enthusiasm in the kingdom of God, the representatives of the old order are up in arms, unless they are uncommonly meek and large-minded, and envy, strife, partisanship, suspend and possibly destroy the work of the Spirit in and through those who are members of Christ's body. And thus chosen witnesses who are anointed by the Divine Spirit are hindered, high vocations broken off, lips touched by the coal from the altar stung into silence, and sensitive natures to which great spiritual achievements seemed possible, turned towards meaner goals. "And Ananias commanded them that stood by to smite him on the mouth." Ananias the high priest has had many imitators, and Paul the victim has likewise had a succession of fellow-sufferers, some of them, perhaps, maimed in their power of prophetic speech to the end. Tempers of envy and ambition, of jealousy and strife, of insolent prerogative and self-vaunting power, not only quench the sacred light within our own souls, but obscure gifts and oppose vocations in the elect souls through whom the Spirit seeks to illuminate and sanctify the world.

It is to be feared that gifts and callings which come down from above are sometimes stifled by the high-

handedness and misrule of those who account themselves lords over God's heritage. The work of the Spirit may be thwarted by the pride of officialism or by the exigencies which arise in the pursuit of party schemes. Of course, rightful authority within Church and State must be maintained. The essential truths of salvation must be upheld by all who speak in Christ's name, and in this sense the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. In every community of disciples, it is a part of the apostolic order that there should be an administration competent to keep its fellowships clean from scandal and flagrant transgression. Hurtful irregularities must be repressed within the Church, and its enterprises and activities co-ordinated into harmonious movement. But no exercise of official power is legitimate which is in excess of what is necessary to secure these three essential conditions. If personal ambition creeps in, if arbitrary methods prevail, if there is the plot and scramble for ascendancy, gifts will inevitably be trampled underfoot, vocations sacrilegiously set aside, and the Spirit who operates in manifold ways through those who are joined to Christ will be grieved and straitened. The Divine call for service is often heard within hearts to which liberty is sacred as life itself, and if there be wanton and habitual infringement of its principles by the rulers of the Church, it may sometimes be hard, if not impossible, for a call to be followed in associations where just liberty is scouted. It is said that an old school missionary who

was welcoming a newly-arrived colleague to the foreign field, said to him at their first interview, "I always like to work my young men just as I work the faculties of my own brain." The young man made up his mind at once that he would never be such a faculty, rightly judging that if God had meant him to work upon such terms, He would have lodged his own particular set of qualities within the older man's head. Perhaps the missionary who looked upon his young brother as a mere annex to his own greatness, was blinded for the moment by unhappy traditions of government, or he would never have let fall a speech that would have been insolent if addressed to a stripling barbarian bought in a slave market and led home by a string. It looked as though the lust of power were stronger in that zealous dictator than his reverence for a prophetic vocation no less Divine than his own. In the judgment of Him who respecteth no man's person, the martinet may have to sustain grave responsibilities for the suppression of lofty gifts in those whom he sanctimoniously hectors. It would be quite possible to name men who have called forth much zeal and fervent devotion by the eloquence of their pulpit and platform appeals, but who in directorates, committees, and bureaus of administration have extinguished more enthusiasm than they have kindled by the advocacy of a lifetime. No Church can be an instrument of the Spirit's varied movements unless it be first free; and it is hard for the gifts

and callings of God to work themselves out to their appointed ends of honour and benediction, where the right of personal judgment is wantonly denied, and liberties of supreme sacredness are trampled under the foot of official pride.

Jesus Christ foresaw the state of things which would sometimes arise within His household, for He spoke of head-servants who would beat their fellow-servants and eat and drink with the drunken. Perhaps He had His far-ranging eye upon those ecclesiastics who side with "the trade" against temperance reform, and who so rule at home that their children grow up apologists for the Sunday opening of public-houses. Perhaps His eye traversed the centuries and rested upon those who, living in these last days, yet think the Church is best governed by the few, who by their autocratic methods lame infant apostles, suppress incipient evangelists, and carry out policies of truculent spiritual extermination worthy of Pharaoh or Herod. The eye is too often heard saying to the hand, "I can see without your help," and the hand to the foot, "If you are not suited, by all means cross the way and join the other conventicle." Alas! alas! in which of our churches may we not find some trace of this tragedy of pride, lapsed vocation, infructuous gift, deferred revival and betterment? The desiccations of the desert furnace-blasts sweep down upon churches round which the rivers of God once circled, and the garden of the Lord shrivels into a petrified forest. A supercilious attitude of mind

towards a fellow-believer is often a sin against the Spirit who works within him. "The members should have the same care for each other." This means that we must be mindful of each other's spiritual fitnesses and functions, for it is only one half of the duty to "weep with those who weep." The loftiest expression of spiritual sympathy is to encourage those who stand upon the threshold of unknown service and are beginning to prove their gifts. Next to his personal salvation, the thing most precious to a Christian believer, is the vocation he has received from God. And it should be precious to others also, for it is only by "that which every joint supplieth, through the effectual working in every part" that the best ideals of edification and prosperity are reached. The hope of the world centres itself in the untested gifts, callings, and endowments which are present in the entire Church, and he who obstructs, defeats, or wastes the store, is the foe of the world's progress and salvation.

But is no line to be drawn? By pushing these words too far, may we not open the floodgates to religious licence and fanaticism? If there is to be no wise and authoritative repression of extravagance in the churches, a sane Christianity may be swamped by fifth monarchy men, premillennarian grotesqueries, Edward Irving's tongues, Dowieism, Christian Science, and a thousand and one aberrations which, in the judgment of sober and common-sense men, dishonour Jesus Christ and His work. But may it not be a

misfortune to crush out even religious vagaries before the people have had the opportunity of seeing what they are? Ought not the law of "the survival of the fittest" to be allowed some little scope; and will not public opinion judge for itself in due time what is the fittest? The Bible itself grew into coherence and exists down to the present time through the operation of this law. Messages incontestably Divine were slowly sifted out by a process of selection from messages of a mixed and compound order, and the popular judgment must have played some part in the process, especially in approving those parts of the Bible which were used for the praise service of the temple. The verdict of the people will sooner or later condemn and banish hurtful religious eccentricities and all fanaticisms; and it is well to be patient whilst the process is completing itself. It is said that domesticated cattle are less sagacious and discerning than wild cattle, and that they will voraciously devour poisonous plants and leaves which the others will at once reject. The self-saving instinct is lost through two or three generations of dependence upon the care of man. And a Christian public unduly domesticated by the priest, with books chosen for them to read, a religious discipline prescribed and applied, may suffer a fatal loss of discernment. The senses of the multitude must get a chance of exercise, so that good and evil may be discriminated; and sooner or later vapid fanaticism and unhealthy extravagance

will be banished with one consent, which is a much healthier thing than by the veto of the few. The narrow coterie, with its premature pronouncements, sometimes checks movements which are of God, and leaves those movements to go on with scant encouragement outside the churches.

The kingdom of God can never be built up by a ruling few, even when their wisdom is beyond criticism. A delegation of angels could not do it. The elect race is to reach its Christlike fulness of stature "through that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in every part." And the working is not effectual when gifts in the most obscure members of Christ's body are set aside. Be genial, sympathetic, rich in spontaneous encouragement towards all religious aptitude and promise, and never run the risk of quenching the Spirit by despising the prophesyings of the man you think the least competent and noteworthy. Try to earn the praise accorded to Phebe, who was a succourer of many, including even the apostle himself, whose hands often needed to be upheld. Beware of the devastating temper of Diotrephes, whose wish to dictate led him both to despise the apostle John, and to trample on the gifts of the Spirit in the lowly and unostentatious.

III.

THE SATISFACTIONS OF SERVICE.

"My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work."—JOHN xiv. 34.

THESE words of the well-side preacher echo the inspired maxim with which He met His first temptation, "man shall not live by bread alone." They imply at the very least an unquestioning dependence upon the sustaining providence of the Father. That providence had sent Him with a message of hope to this loose-living woman; and in the appointed pathway of His vocation, He could not faint or perish. God decrees that every man to whom He has prescribed a task upon earth shall live to the last hour occupied by the task; and God's decrees admit of no defeat through lack of ways and means for their accomplishment. The same word that commissions a general to lead forth a regiment through the wilderness spreads the table of his followers, at least under humane and civilised governments. The general might go for the purpose of sport or exploration into the desert a hundred times, and find no food there, for his private schemes do not come

into the reckoning of the government; but when he goes at the word of his king, he and his followers are as surely fed as though a magician had changed sands into cornfields and rocks into granaries. If the king's forces should become mutinous, or desert to the enemy, of course the supplies may be cut off. And in the realm of the temporal and of the spiritual alike, the man will be fed and sustained in life, and his many-sided needs will be satisfied, if he does the will and carries out the work of the Master who sent him. The natural fact closely looked at yields a moral truth—it is through obedience to God that our souls are held in life and our feet securely kept.

Men feel this as by instinct whose pursuits are not directly spiritual, and who even lack the faith which is the keynote of Christian character. Nansen in one of his early books disavows all religious formularies, and yet after an accident which threatened to strand him helpless in the cruel polar seas, writes: "Death, I believe, can never approach before one's mission is accomplished; never come without one feeling its proximity; and yet a cold fate may one day cut the thread without warning." He avows his faith in a rule which nevertheless has unhappy exceptions. To him who is obedient to a heavenly vision, and who has bent himself to a less barren end than that of reaching a difficult goal of mystery and darkness, a higher consciousness surely belongs. Prophets and apostles had this consciousness, and in Jesus it attained cloudless illumination.

This faith in the Divine word, proclaimed and exemplified by the tempted Son of Man, was abundantly recompensed. Led forth by the Spirit who interpreted the Father's counsels into a bleak, untempered wilderness, He was not left to die at the end of His vigil, for angels came and ministered to Him. The God who fed ancient Israel, giving His people bread from heaven, was with the Head of the new Israel, and vouchsafed this amazing sign that bread was not the only substance with which He could sustain in life the soul of an elect servant.

And in the words with which Jesus replies to the request of the disciples that He would eat of the food they had bought, a further truth is set forth. *The high satisfactions of a loyal spirit convey themselves to the flesh, so that the sense of physical privation is forgotten by the man who is absorbed in the work of winning his generation from their sins.* The inspirations of spiritual service have the power to strangely uphold and uplift the natural life. Lord and disciple alike may be invigorated by the task of the day, if that task is of a sufficiently high and ennobling kind. The Old Testament narratives of prophets and lawgivers, who, on granite heights and in treeless deserts, were nurtured by inscrutable processes, are of permanent interest, and teach not only that God's servants live by His word of power, but that to do His will is nurture, invigoration, essential and unconquerable health for body

and mind alike. A prophet cannot die till his work is finished, and it is his meat to teach, rebuke, and save. The spirit of a man puts forth pressing demands, and its hunger, when unappeased, may aggravate that of the body. On the other hand, the satisfaction of those demands may convey itself to the life of the senses, and those who keep themselves in sympathetic fellowship and co-operation with the Father's will, have meat to eat of which the natural man knows not. Workers in the kingdom of God upon earth often feel that an immortal breath is in them, dilating the faculties and permeating the blood itself. The sense of vitality reaches its high-water mark in consecrated service.

Many facts tend to show that the principle expressed in these words asserts itself in the more superficial aspects of our common life. The dreamy indolent savage has a precarious, ill-nurtured physique, however fully nature may provide for his wants, rarely attaining length of days. There is always room for blighting passions to run riot in an occupied life, and even when such passions are curbed, vacancy and discontent corrode and break down a vitality that ought to be exuberant. The races which shun toil are weedy, wilted, easily decimated by disease, mortal beyond the common mean, and "do not live out half their days." The best blessing conferred upon us by modern civilisation is not the heritage of scientific

devices it puts at our service, but the demand it makes upon our thought, time, activity. Its exacting insistency is a golden spur, the prick of which all need at intervals. A man may pinch his soul by systematic lethargy and inaction. The highest faculties hibernate when a man can find nothing to do, and the hole into which he creeps for that ignoble pastime is only another name for a tomb. How often does it happen that when a merchant or tradesman withdraws from an active life, intending to make the most of a long, restful eventide, he dies — dies through the very change from bustle to lethargy. An eager, well-exercised mind is one of the conditions of health, and it would be easy to throw the argument into a physiological form. The long lives of judges and clergymen are proverbial, and the clergyman is not always a country rector with pony carriage, and a trout stream at his doors. When brain and heart, as well as hands and feet, are kept in constant exercise, the chances of life increase manifold. It is one of the mercies of modern civilisation that in spite of its fierce tyrannies it tends to make idleness impossible. The man at a loose end is under an organic curse. Work is just as much a staff of life as bread, and Jesus makes the two things of equivalent practical efficacy.

The movements which aim at shortening the hours of labour need to be supplemented by movements

for filling up, with pursuits which are wholesome and refining, the time rescued from grubbing and drudgery. It has been computed that if every man did his fair share of labour, the civilisation of which we are so proud might be carried to yet higher perfection, and the world clothed, housed, and fed at an outlay of four hours toil a day from each adult citizen. But it is a grave problem how men would spend the eight or ten hours gained for themselves. Such a proportion of time passed in the public-house, on the race-course, in the betting-den would be no gain either to the community or its individual members. An enlarged opportunity for idleness might not only begin a new epoch of degradation, but even send up the death-rate.

There are two kinds of slavery in the world—the slavery of those who are over-driven and underfed, and the slavery of those who are overfed and under-driven,—and the second is the more dismal of the two. A man may possess millions, and yet if he have no adequate occupation for hand or brain, be in a state of pitiable privation. The sort of creature sketched in the phrase, "a man about town," is more of a martyr than the half-starved seamstress, for an emaciated body is less of a burden than a famished soul; and he who does not find the horizon of his daily life filled with clamant duties, is under the more crushing curse. Nothing is to be said in defence of those economic systems which turn human

life into an agony of compulsory labour; but the gilded vacancy of the West End club kills by a slow death no less sure than that of which the sweater is the instrument. Perhaps as many people perish through idleness as by excess of toil, and the traditions which make luxurious leisure ideal are as cruel as they are treacherous.

The cup of overflowing good belongs to the man who is most fully occupied, and the excess of selfish leisure is its own penalty. The gloomy moods which tear our souls like vultures are the moods which come to us on the days when we have persuaded ourselves that we have nothing to do. The man who saunters listlessly through life knows well enough that he is under a ban; and the unhappiness he carries about with him is as dreadful as though he were the victim of a hot, gnawing, inward growth. The poet Gray, after writing his famous "Elegy," produced nothing more of account in literature to the end of his days, and became the victim of obstinate melancholy. James Russell Lowell, in venturing an explanation of this darkness which fell upon the spirit of the poet, says it had nothing akin to the despondency of Cowper, because he was not endowed with any marked degree of religious sensibility. Nor did it arise, like much of the pessimism of the passing hour, from contemplating the sufferings of the great masses around him, because "responsibility for the universe had not then been invented." But it had its cause in "the abeyance of his powers."

The man who does not employ himself in harmony with his own endowments for service, will have the same experience of hunger and inward restlessness. The greater his possibilities, the bitterer will be the torment of his discontent. In common tasks we cannot fail to find much that will minister to our inward satisfaction; whilst he whose work, like that of Jesus, is Divinely appointed and Divinely helped, possesses a mystic nutriment unknown to the world, and incredible even to a crude and backward discipleship.

And this truth asserts itself most impressively, as the work included in the scheme of our duties rises in intrinsic excellence, and demands our best faculties for its fulfilment. In human nature there is a gradation of aptitudes corresponding to the different kinds of work which God, in His providence, has assigned us; and whilst any kind of activity begets some degree of satisfaction, the nobler the enterprises which employ us, the finer is the inward contentment of which we become conscious. And the converse is most tragically true. No privation is so bitter as that which arises from the disuse of our highest talents for service. Famine is most appalling in its terror when we see the luxuriously-nurtured suffer in common with those who have been more or less inured to hardship. In a striking passage of his writings, Jeremiah describes "the little ones of the nobles" in times of drought going to the wells to find there only parched and empty pits. And our

princeliest faculties suffer thirst and intolerable distress when no part is taken in the spiritual work allotted by Jesus Christ to His followers. We can only be filled with the sense of sufficiency and well-being, through diligence in our providential tasks, and this includes participation in the spiritual work of the kingdom, as well as faithfulness in common things. Sometimes the best side of our nature is disquieted by an unappeased and feverish craving, because in those loftier spheres of service, which correspond to the diviner gifts and endowments of the soul, so little is attempted and done.

Food is grateful to the taste, and by its varied savours, Nature allures man to the nurture of his bodily life. She is against suicide, and self-starvation is perhaps the rarest form of that particular crime. It is only when conditions of disease exist that the food by which we are sustained becomes nauseous and repugnant to our senses. And in the same way God woos us to His work by the sweet satisfactions it affords; and He who is the pattern of all that is best in service, could forget hunger and physical faintness in wise and pitiful ministries to an ignorant and perishing soul. It is a high delight to do God's will by promoting the spiritual well-being of a neighbour; and, alas! for us if we have not made this discovery for ourselves. It is vital to our development. We shall grow into divine beauty by the use of this food, and become princelier in visage than Daniel. To do God's work is adorn-

ment and invigoration for both body and mind. The more closely our work approximates to that of Jesus, the richer and more stable will be the satisfactions that we shall find in it. Some of us would neither care to live, nor have power to do so, if we were to turn back from the work to which God calls. Tolstoi has well said, "If man did not believe he must live for something, he would cease to live at all."

In the preface to one of his books, Dr Paget gives an extract from the writings of a Christian monk of the third century, who describes a nervous disorder often befalling the religious houses where early Christians secluded themselves. The trouble seems to have been caused by insufficient occupation and lack of hope in almost equal proportions. "Monks find it most troublesome about twelve o'clock, so that some of the aged have held it to be the sickness that wasteth at noonday." It made the religious recluse loathe the place of his sojourn, criticise his brethren and their rules of life, despair of religious progress unless the lot could be changed, and think enviously of the greater privileges enjoyed by the inmates of other monasteries. "At last he thinks he cannot be saved if he stops where he is; and then about eleven or twelve o'clock he feels as tired as if he had walked miles. He goes out and looks this way and that, and sighs to think no one is coming to visit him."

This particular ailment, endemic in the early

monasteries, was the penalty of selfish aloofness from the world practised under the guise of piety, and at the present hour it afflicts many who call themselves by Christ's name and shut themselves up in homes, rigidly guarded against intrusion as by monastery gates. We find no trace of this spiritual *malaise* in the apostles and the evangelists of the past. It is inconceivable that Paul should have fallen a victim to such a distressing mood. It cast no shadow over the sensitive spirit of Jesus Christ. But it will always harass the Church which becomes superciliously self-contained, and ceases to act upon the outside world. We can only work out our soul's salvation by working out the social and religious problems that everywhere stare us in the face. The Church or individual keeping aloof from the common work of God in the redemption of human society out of its thraldoms, can hope for nothing better than an imperfectly oxygenated life and chronic inanition. Nurture, health, richness of experience can only be found in enterprise. It is still the meat of every soul in which Christ is formed to do the will of the Father.

The apostle Paul learned contentment or self-sufficingness through the zeal with which he gave himself to his providential tasks; and the strength and satisfaction thus acquired more than repaired the waste, and compensated the wear and tear of his enormous labours. The hunger of his strenuous nature could not have been appeased, unless he had

found in Jesus Christ not only a Saviour to trust, but likewise a Master to serve. The Son of God Himself could not have proved His royal rank as the princes of this world once sought to prove theirs—by magnificent idleness. "He came not to be ministered unto but to minister." The Divine qualities within Him would have been volatilised, and the very God incarnate in His humanity would have flickered out into darkness of oblivion, had Jesus been less active in doing good. He was strengthened to His commanding spiritual excellence by the high tasks to which, with unwearied zeal, He dedicated body and soul. He could not have been the sum of all perfection, and have achieved His life of supreme religious grandeur, apart from His intense, sustained, unsleeping activity. His incomprehensible vitality is fed by well-doing. He braced Himself for the cross by all the service which preceded it. The Eternal God Himself lives His deathless life through activity, and a supine God with latent attributes is unthinkable.

In these words our Lord suggests that it is only by the prosecution of His work to the end that His best satisfactions can be kept, and that He can reach the largest life set before Him. There must be no broken links in the chain of His earthly ministry, and most important of all the last link must not be wanting. That He should continue His work up to its grand redemptive consummation was of absolute urgency. It was not enough He should begin it in Galilee.

After continuing it at brief intervals in Samaria, He must finish it at Jerusalem. Everything turned upon the last term of His ministry, and the beginning and middle were making ready for the solemn end. In our century, the work of Jesus would scarcely have been heard of had He stopped half way in its pursuit, and its very perfection and efficacy was in its last acts. Baalam, Saul, the prophet sent to Bethel, all rise up before the view as men whose lives ended in frightful anti-climax, and who failed to finish the work for which they had been called, commissioned, and inspired. We cannot conceive of Jesus turning back to a world which had never cast the thread of a single inveiglement about His spirit; but we can perhaps think of Him as shrinking from the unexampled ordeal of the cross. He might have left His work without its coping-stone, and in that case we should not have heard any echo of His name, or at least not have heard of it as the name which is above every name. The most important part of His mission was in its closing act, and His soul could not have been satisfied nor His ideal of life reached unless he had finished the work for which He was sent.

And this is true for us. The most significant part of our work lies in its closing stages. Many of Christ's followers are content with a spell of zealous enthusiastic work in the days of their youth and early manhood; but the later career is less active, and therefore less soul-contenting. A time comes to

most of us when, because of the fret and strain, the pressure and encroachment of ever-multiplying engagements, we are compelled to be sparing of our energies; and to do this is probably no departure from the providential plan of our lives. But it is grave disloyalty to that plan, when, for anything short of dire disabling affliction, we abandon the work to which God has called and guided us. Every part of our Lord's work was important, but upon its dread climax He dwelt with absorbed thoughtfulness, and girt Himself solemnly for the terrible demand. And Providence puts the most significant part of our work towards the close, when we have grown ripe in knowledge and character; and we necessarily miss the plenary satisfactions made ready for us, and fall back into a feebler and less perfect life, unless we make it our meat to finish, as well as to begin and continue, our providential work. The discipline and experience of thirty, forty, or fifty years, should surely help to produce some transcendent fruit before death cuts us down.

What are the conditions necessary to an experience of these inward Christlike satisfactions? The sense that God has sent us forth; that His providential will accomplishes itself through our work; and that we love with such filial fervour and devotion the Father who has appointed our life-tasks, that it is a privation to disobey His summons.

The work which is to yield these sure inward satisfactions must be authoritatively commissioned,

This is the only thought which can compensate us for discouragements, and keep us steadfast whilst engaged in the service of mankind. Haphazard and fortuitous work, work capriciously chosen, and followed up at the bidding of the natural preference, can yield no soul-sustaining virtue. If our work is to be the vehicle of inward solace and strength, God Himself must project its lines and ordain its parts. "To find oneself business is the great art of life," said one of our chief poets who fell below his promise for lack of direction. "Some spirit, some genius more than common, is required to teach man how to employ himself. To be employed is to be happy." Such a genius to direct we have in the Spirit of wisdom and knowledge who abides with us. If our days are to be fruitful in achievement, we must remember that we are His envoys and apostles, sent, however obscure our station and humble our gifts, as truly as the Son Himself.

Work yielding the best satisfactions tends to accomplish God's will, and is always subject to His control. Such a service will be a secret spring of strength and blessedness in the depths of the spirit. The very act of doing it will sensibly feed the Divine life within us.

And if we are to derive from daily service the help and comfort found in it by our Lord and Master, we must have in ourselves the love of God and ready sympathy with all His counsels. If God is to us a rigid taskmaster of stupendous power, and nothing

more, in the midst of nobly conceived activities we shall be still embittered and enfeebled with the sense of privation. Such a love will enable us to speak to a despised and prejudiced alien as Jesus spake to this flighty, loose-living Samaritan woman at the well.

Is it possible for us poor mortals to realise that we are sent of God in some special sense as was Jesus His only Son? Yes, if we have the spirit of adoption, and at the same time account ourselves God's instruments. God's wisdom is such that it is as easy for Him to appoint our work and determine the order of it, as it was to define the life-plan made known to His Son. Indeed, in designing the work of His Son, God designed our work, if we are in union with Him in His fellowship of continued service. It is His work we are given to do, and not our own, and the doubt whether we are commissioned, as was the Son, is begotten of the fact that we are habitually thinking of the work we do as though it were ours rather than His.

Under the strain and pressure of modern life, how many are ready to claim exemption from direct service! After the toils and worries of the week must we not rest? Seasons of relaxation it is true are indispensable, but the season of relaxation is sometimes an ill-fated crisis of decline. The heat of the summer days, the weariness of the dusty pilgrimage, the hunger and the parched lips of Jesus, did not make Him forget the needs of a poor guilty soul, and

the Father's will in her redemption. To teach and admonish a solitary woman by the well was more to Him than food and drink. The very effort put forth on her behalf revived and invigorated His powers. And in winning souls from the error of their ways and announcing the good news of salvation, we may find the best relief from the strain, faintness, and discomfort of the earthly pilgrimage. Growing like Him in character and service, seeking the lost with patient love, and accomplishing in Samaria and down to the very end the will of our Father in heaven, we shall find rest, recuperation, and ecstasy of life.

IV.

EQUIPPED FOR WELL-DOING.

"Ready unto every good work."—TITUS iii. 1.

THESE words describe the normal attitude of mind which the Christian believers in the island of Crete were to maintain with steadfast resolution. The place in which Titus was instructed to press home such counsels did not look a very promising field for their application. The side-lights cast in this epistle upon the more prominent characteristics of the population, might have tempted observers of even average hopefulness to say, that the many good works, for which the Christians must hold themselves in constant readiness, would be futile and fail of their rightful end. The little sea-girt province was at that time, and for many centuries afterwards, the unhappy Ireland of the Levant, oppressed and erupting with insurgency and political intrigue by turns; and so it has continued to our own day. The Jewish colonists were often amongst the most active agitators, and the atmosphere of the place seemed to breed a delirious political fever that was endemic.

The indigenous populations moreover were coarse, gluttonous, materialistic, and, the gap of religious caste notwithstanding, must have more or less infected Jewish settlers with their revolting habits. One of their own poets was so lacking in patriotism that he painted the evil peculiarities of the race in the darkest colours. This nest of the lower appetites, this arena of intrigue, discontent, insubordination was not an alluring sphere for the practice of the higher Christian charities. And yet the apostle's command implies that these degraded peoples were not without their moods of susceptibility. Times were sure to come round when the most sodden hearts would be unlocked and susceptible, and for such unexpected opportunities of usefulness believers must be always prepared. A later verse in the chapter reminds "that God's kindness to all men had appeared," and inasmuch as such kindness could not be finally ineffectual, they must think in harmony with it and be its instruments. In the midst of these degraded crowds, not only must they practice the normal rules of the Christian life, keeping close to high standards of rectitude and self-restraint; but the genius for active goodness which marks the true followers of Him "who went about doing good" must be in them, and the opportunities brought to them by God's providence under the most disheartening conditions must not find them wanting. Calls to service, like the Lord's coming to judgment, may sometimes be upon us

when we are not looking for them. "Ready unto every good work." It is much more likely that we shall miss the pregnant occasion, than that the occasion will fail to arrive.

The history of failure is the story of unreadiness. A great engineering work, bridge or breakwater as the case may be, collapses in a night, because it was not quite ready for flood or cyclone, and the defences had been taken away too soon. A business house, established for generations, goes down in a financial panic because there are no realisable securities to meet the dark and evil day. Within living memory, a neighbouring nation of brilliant history was shaken to the foundations, because its ruler challenged a war for which the country was unprepared. It is said that the defeats which overtook Napoleon Buonaparte during the last few years of his public life arose from an incapacity to take quick action, caused by an obscure malady of body and mind which was insidiously creeping over him. He lost his early habit of promptness, and brought upon himself the tragic penalty of hesitation. In his mid-career he had been accustomed to work through the night with his staff officers around him, and long before daybreak his dispositions had been made. But on the fateful morning of Waterloo, with every advantage on his side, he could not make up his mind, and the day was well advanced before the French troops were put into movement. He was not sure of himself,

his plans, his preparations, his supports; and it is perhaps as well for us to-day that in the times of our forefathers he was unready.

When everything is on our side, do we not lose many an opportunity for advancing the kingdom of God and the truth, because of some inward spiritual malady that has secretly established itself within us? The providential occasion for service comes and goes, and we find our hands tied, our souls frozen, our hearts astray. Disabling moods and tempers overtake us, and we miss the tide through unpreparedness, and that tide at least never comes back to us. The Church again and again dallies away openings undeniably providential and of surprising magnitude. It lets its chances go by default with certain classes of society, with particular races, with men of special calibre or training, with great empires waiting for high example and wise leading. The Church is not ready for half the open doors at home or abroad which invite its ministries. By hesitation, reluctance to advance, lack of courage, partial will-paralysis, and other insidious maladies of the spiritual life, we lose far more than the great Napoleon. The opportunity for good work, in some form or other, comes with unfailing punctuality, and we are found remiss.

This malady sometimes shows itself in *a disabling sense of personal unfitness for the task which solicits us.* We are deterred by a fear lest our effort should do

more harm than good. This halting attitude may arise from either real or imaginary causes. Conscience, perchance, upbraids us justly for unseemly acts or courses of wrong-doing which threaten to turn our good works into elaborate insincerities, potent for mischief rather than amelioration. We have been betrayed into conduct which hinders our faith in the Divine blessing. Shall we not be wasting our seed upon fields placed under a ban, as far at least as our sowing is concerned? May not the good seed change itself into darnel if it pass through our unworthy hands? There is an obliquity in the life which needs to be put right, and till it has been reckoned with we cannot be ready for the opportunity which all at once confronts us. We stop at this point in our career, because we have forgotten that Jesus offered Himself without spot "to purge" our "conscience from dead works to serve the living God." No man with a racked, heavy-laden conscience can do God's work amongst men, and the malady must be healed at the cross before fitness for service can be attained. Or, perhaps, the temper has got obstinately disordered, and we are incapable of the patience and the pity which are at the root of all true usefulness. We are soured, distressed, antagonised by worldly affairs, and cannot, like the Master, give sympathy and comfort from our own bleeding hearts. For a time at least we have no mind to apply to any one's affairs but our own. We have been disturbed from our wonted graciousness by the dishonourable act, the unkind speech, the ungrate-

ful outrageous judgment of others. We dare not speak till the pain is appeased, or our words might be hard, bitter, withering, misdirected. Secular things have got the best of our thought, and we are despiritualised. The mind will not cheerfully face the opportunity which bids us. We are like the surgeon who, confronted with a sudden catastrophe, finds to his dismay that instruments have not been kept in undimmed polish, that much rust must be removed and septic mischief sterilised before he can get to work upon his humane ministries. We are aware of such an inward heavy-hearted recoil, that if the call which suddenly comes is meant for us, we cannot answer it with confidence and satisfaction. Perhaps we have false ideas of equipment. We want time to get into the right frame of mind. The transition from common-place to high-minded activities, from the scenes of sordid struggle which have absorbed us to scenes in which we must copy the works of the Master, is too abrupt and incongruous. Just so ; God meant it to be a part of our training that there should be no space for preparation, so as to impress upon us the need of being always ready. Paul had this practical problem in view when he urged Timothy to be "instant in season and out of season." The preparation is part of our common life, and we are not truly "ready unto every good work" unless we are always ready. We must keep ourselves in continuous fitness to serve others, both by word and deed, according to the will of God.

This infirmity which hampers our life-work sometimes arises from the fact that *we project our own unfitness into the minds of others, and assume that they are not ready to improve by the good works we are sent to do.* The unreadiness seems to be not so much in ourselves as in the people with whom we are confronted, and our backwardness is thereby excused. According to the temper which possesses us, we see the fields white to harvest, or scarcely green with the upbreaking life. It is, of course, true that the words and works in which we ought to abound must have some kind of correspondence with right and fitting seasons; but in our unbelieving lethargy we give off vapours which obscure the summer and darken the outlook with shadows. The reason why men seem so unsuited for the missions of kindness and testimony to which we have been designated is, that we bring our discordant and incompatible moods to the interpretation of their condition. There is a vague feeling within us that we must wait till our neighbours have seen the madness of their folly, and attain a more sober appreciation of the meaning of life. After they have passed through providential disciplines, which we can neither set up nor accelerate, it may be they will prove a more hospitable soil for the enterprises to which we have formally consecrated ourselves. Perhaps if we had prayed over these crude, insusceptible souls, and held ourselves in vigilant readiness for the answer to our prayers, we should be able to see more assuring signs of their capacity to profit by

our good works. When we think them unprepared, is it not that we ourselves are unequal to all that God would have us do for them, or we have never identified ourselves with them in believing intercession? Indeed, we shall always be equipped for ministration to those on whose behalf we rightly pray. To the view of Jesus Christ, who through every hour of His earthly course was "ready unto every good work," the fields were always whiter than to the eyes of His unprepared disciples. His own outreaching faith was like a magnet which found out properties of fitness in all the circles through which He moved, and, indeed, created that fitness where it was wanting. Some people are as incapable of discovering the spiritual aptitudes of coarse and frivolous natures as the glass rod passed through a sand-heap is of attracting to itself the hidden particles of steel there. The eager and hopeful outlook of Jesus Christ was a logical sequence to the continuous equipment of His own soul. He conveyed the temper of His own readiness into every class that crowded upon Him, and the normal motive of His life was to go about doing good.

The first condition of this habitual fitness for service is *a mind attuned to the Divine kindness, and in constant agreement with the good-will of God.* In the strife and ferment of common life, it is not always easy to maintain the spirit enjoined by the apostle. It is certain we shall not reach this ideal responsiveness to the calls of service,

if we scrutinise too closely the sentiments of those who must be won to better things by the well-doing of Christ's followers. To seek inspiration and motive-power from those whose needs require us, will chill our souls and retard their best aspirations. We can only attain this temper of mind by suffusing ourselves with the good-will of God towards those on whom we are tempted to think our highest charities of labour may be wasted. We shall never falter in good works, or miss the great opportunities which lie in our providential pathway, if we are possessed by the remembrance of God and His mercy to just and unjust alike. We often need to be whipped up into a faint and distant imitation of Him "who went about doing good." The work for which we find ourselves habitually unprepared is always slavery to us, and it is slavery because we have not learned delight in the fulfilment of God's will. If doing good is not a prompt and paramount impulse with us, our fellowship with the God and Father of all mankind is obscured, perhaps even broken off. By entering into the Divine mind, we ought to be refreshed and warmed into such habitual graciousness towards men, that no possibility of usefulness will ever come to us amiss. To do good beyond even the bare requirements of average Christian consistency ought to be an eager and insistent instinct within us. A man of science, who has been trying the effect of chloroform upon plants, finds that by the administration of this

anæsthetic he can make them put forth buds and blossoms in the depth of winter. But true and abiding fruit could not be produced by such an expedient. It would be impossible to run a Kent or a Worcestershire fruit-orchard by relying upon the trick of the chemist. The normal showers of the spring, and the normal sunshine of the summer, can alone give us the sweet and fragrant produce with which our fruit-markets are set out. Good people are sometimes stirred up by artificial excitement to a brief, efflorescent fruitfulness. They rise to white-heat in a mission, and visit the poor for a time, when the newspapers tell us great ladies are setting the example. Social and religious movements become a passing fashion, and they are spurred into transient prosperity by a whiff of applause, or a feverish anticipation of swift success. But the Christian attitude of mind must be normal. Men must live always in the light of God's countenance, and feel His breath upon the very consciousness if they are to be ready unto every good work.

It is but another way of stating the same truth to affirm that *Christ and His Word must be in us as the foundation of this fitness.* The Word which abides in us supplies the code through which all intimations of the Divine will must be interpreted and applied. In sending Marconigraphs across the sea, it is necessary that the instruments should be "syntonised" with each other. Unless receiver and transmitter are keyed into a fine correspondence

the message will be lost, and the electric vibrations which indicate it will wander unread through the wide spaces of the air. The Bible "syntonises" us with the mind of God, making us sensitive subjects of His fine commands. It is through every Scripture "inspired of God" that "the man of God is furnished unto every good work." The inspiration which created the Scriptures is of endless continuity, and, far from terminating in the soul of apostle or prophet, perpetuates itself with unabating vigour and vitality in the Church of all ages. It is thus that we are assured of the final triumph of goodness, and saved from the temptation to look upon our labour as spent in vain. The Word is our defence against the morbid and vexing fear of barrenness. It enables us to see the significance of common opportunities, the remunerative possibilities concealed in the routine of each returning day. The Word brings us into a common atmosphere with the Divine servant of the needy race, and imparts His benign secret. It is the medium in which the influence of His gracious personality inheres, and the life which is bedewed in its teachings it will saturate with beatific power. If His temper of untiring charity possess us, we shall not miss the high occasions brought within our reach. His Word is charged with His own affections, and if it continue in us we shall be like the trees on the banks of the river of God, and many will be refreshed and restored by the fruits we yield. To receive and keep His Word, which means salvation

for ourselves and others, we must be wise, watchful, diligent.

A further essential of this daily fitness for service is a firm assurance that *since God has made it the chief function of the new life that it should abound in good works, He cannot possibly put us under conditions where this high function will be thwarted.* He has so ordained the world into which we are sent, that it is a meet sphere for this Christlike vocation. In one of His last talks with the disciples, the Master said: "I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain." The nurseryman does not select and prepare his young fruit stocks with skill and delicate care for export to the Sahara or Spitzbergen. Do we not sometimes speak as though we were vines and fig-trees mockingly planted in deserts or on ice-floes, and had no chance of showing the best that is in us? In many things the world disappoints us, but it has this redeeming virtue, it is a place of great opportunities. The evil works we find around us must be replaced by good; and if mankind is not so friendly to our noblest enterprises as we could wish, we must remember that this very fact should call us, as it called our Lord, to a more heroic altruism. God's chief reason for keeping us in spheres fraught with sin, pain, and perplexity, is that we may continue the mission of the Master who went about making things better, and, unlike His half-believing disciples, was never found unequal to the

demands of the day. For the individual and the Church, God opens out pathways of ministration which, as He judges things, are sufficiently hopeful. The fruit-bearing disciple is never put down into a neighbourhood where his function will be atrophied by inevitable disuse. We are not "ready unto every good work" unless we believe that each fresh daydawn will bring its munificent opportunities, and that to be unready for an hour is to miss some part of our providential vocation. There will not be in any of us a continuous preparation for holy service unless there be also a firm belief that the call for service is both unceasing and Divine.

This fitness for every kind of gracious service *must be maintained by diligent daily exercise.* The apostle's phrase implies a quiet, sustained, and gracious habit, and not intermittent bursts of magnificent endeavour. If we succumb to carelessness, discouragement, and those temptations to inaction, which never cease to assail, it is quite easy to get out of the way of doing good. A French writer has said: "If Paganini, who uttered his soul through the strings of his violin, spent three days without practising, he lost what he called the stops of his instrument, meaning the sympathy between the wooden frame, the strings, the bow, and himself. If he had lost this alliance, he would have been no more than an ordinary player." And that sympathy between the soul of the worker, the written word, the stricken race and the God who redeemed it, which is the main-

spring of all great achievement, may be lost by neglect. A holy prompting once, twice, or thrice obeyed — a prompting which carries with it the promise of a gracious habit — may disappear into the void. When the early Moravians fell under the influence of the German mystics they sometimes said: "If you find yourself moved, if your heart is free to it, reprove, exhort, relieve." They put such stress upon the passive temper, that they would only go to the sacrament, or practice almsgiving when urged by special, clamant, inborne longings. Such a rule would have left prophets and apostles with half their work undone. The kingdom of God cannot come through abnormal and fluctuating inspirations. The practice of good works must be the common habit, and not the result of an exceptional and resistless pressure upon the soul from the unseen. Our best impulses will die away unless we follow them, and that, too, at the times when no exceptional movement agitates the consciousness. The trees of the Lord's planting must not be like those trees of which the botanist tells us, species which flower at long intervals only. The world will never be won to the faith, if the well-doing of those who follow Christ is spasmodic.

Nothing can make up for the lack of this inward readiness. Soulless formality may vitiate the service of man just as hurtfully as the service of God. The constrained and servile temper in our work which arises from inward unreadiness, will soon make itself

felt. The part of the mind which lies in the dim background has its work to do in the uplifting of the world, and if we minister to our generation with faltering and divided hearts, we are foredoomed to fail. The entire nature must be delicately tempered, so that we may possess this readiness. When the wrong mood momentarily asserts itself and we are disabled, the art of a swift penitence is required, so that we may recover spiritual capacity before the opportunity has irrevocably passed. Let us live in continuous converse with God. It is fatal to an army to be cut off from its base of supplies. How often does the enemy try to put himself between us and the God from whom our strength and sufficiency flow? "Ready to every good work," means to be on speaking terms with God. We must always know His mind and answer to His bidding.

An American writer was recently describing his plans for mastering the difficulties which thwarted the Panama Canal project a generation ago. The first failure was not entirely caused by financial stress. The awful climate of the isthmus killed every kind of labourer who was enlisted in the task. Negro, Arab, tough Chinaman alike succumbed in their thousands and tens of thousands. Before many years are over, said this sanguine writer, the canal will be made, and this without serious loss of life. The mosquitoes which convey the microbes of malaria and yellow fever must be exterminated. This can be done by draining the pools in which they deposit their eggs, and, where

draining is impossible, by covering the surface of the water with paraffin oil, so that the larvæ when hatched will be unable to reach the surface. Each worker must be compelled to sleep within mosquito nets. The diseases conveyed by these tormenting insects once stamped out, the labourer will live on in health and vigour despite the wasting heat. And to guard against the ravages of enteric, a supply of pure water must be brought from the mountains and carried along the line of work; whilst overseers must watch against the use of tainted puddles. In this way the men who toil at that abandoned project will be kept in health, and the task, impossible twenty-five years ago, will be done, to the astonishment of the world.

We need some method of keeping Christian workers in heart and vigour, and year-long fitness. The servants of Christ's advancing kingdom have sometimes fainted in their mighty projects, and glorious dreamers have found themselves sick with weakness and ready to drop in the hot pestilential wilderness. Insidious poisons get into the very blood and breed lassitude, despondency, death. The workers are stung by ill-will, ingratitude, and the envenomed depreciations of a petty generation of censors. Strength fails and the noblest visions change into a distempered delirium which precedes the end. The history of Christ's kingdom often seems a series of failures—a chain of graves into which many hopes have passed. It is surely not impossible for us to become immune against

the moral poisons which waste our strength and unfit us for service. A new secret of protection against the baneful ferments which depress zeal, drain away all vigour, and destroy the worker, must be found. We need to have a fresh atmosphere created around our souls, in which the selfishness, the envy, the carping, the vexing ambitions of the world shall no longer disquiet our spirits and poison the springs of our vigour. And we must daily drink of the river which flows from God's throne to our very doors. Scripture is inspired of God that "the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto every good work." It brings spiritual health and capacity to the man who drinks of the streams which flow down to us from the heights of God. "With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation." When every believer has learned the art of being ready unto every good work, which is one and the same with the art of keeping the glow of health in the spiritual life, the broken projects of the past shall grow into fulfilment and the kingdom of God shall everywhere appear.

If we are ready for every good work we are ready for the coming of the King. In those parables of the Advent recorded by St Luke, fitness for the Master's return means efficiency in the work and order of the household. If we abound always in those sacred charities to which the spirit of Jesus prompts us, we shall be in the best possible position for hearing the high praise which ushers in glory,

honour, and immortal life. "Inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these, ye did it unto Me." The highest blessedness is to pass into the open presence of the Son of God from the post of active duty. The midnight call is a call to more exalted service, and he who is "ready for every good work" here, of course, has loins girt, lamp burning, and is well equipped for the mysteries which are in the great future. The man who lives a life of readiness for gracious ministration to his contemporaries, is ready for the Lord's appearing, and for the crown He comes to bestow.

V.

THE ABOUNDING ASSURANCE.

"Unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding."—COLOSSIANS ii. 2.

THE apostle has just been speaking of an intense spiritual struggle through which he has passed on behalf of the churches at Colosse and Laodicea, to most of whose members he was personally unknown. The purpose of his supplication was that they might be comforted, bound together into a compact fellowship, and enriched with sure and all-sufficing spiritual knowledge—three blessings vitally connected with each other. Failing of such attainments they could not hope to rise above that fickleness which left them the prey of wandering sophists.

At the present hour we are not given to spend the best of our zeal upon these particular objects. Perhaps we look upon them even as of secondary importance. Our tears, our struggles, our holy violence we lavish upon the reprobate and the outcast. Missions to a world lying in wickedness, especially if it is slightly ragged, absorb our thought and prayer, and rightly so. But it is sometimes

assumed that the work of building up the Church in knowledge and holiness is a little less urgent, and that we may go about it with the quiet, unruffled, matter-of-fact temper that marks us in our common pursuits. When men have once been plucked out of the burning, we think the immediate danger is past, and if their spiritual life is not rich, full, firmly-based, they may be left alone for awhile. They are God's people, and things will surely work out all right in the end. Such was not the apostle's standpoint. He knew that if the churches were knit together in love, and illuminated with the full assurance of knowledge, the best conditions for dealing with the outside world would have been secured. A religious society in which there is no strong conviction, and where "full assurance" is looked upon as either unattainable or indifferent, will fail to make any deep impression upon the men and women outside its borders. Paul agonised in spirit that these churches might attain this high standard. Such an experience would guarantee them against hypocrisy, and enable them to bear a witness to which the world would give heed. If you trace his thought back link by link to the last chapter, you will see how he attributes this intense and special desire to the mighty working of God within him. It must, therefore, be a part of God's purpose to bring the followers of His Son to this full assurance of knowledge. God could not mock His servant by constraining him to pray for the unattainable.

The subject-matter of this assurance is the mystery of God's purpose towards us in Christ Jesus. God in Christ must be directly apprehended as a personal Saviour, and, for the time being, all intermeddling with outlying speculations must cease. We must seek to know, first of all, that which is vital to our spiritual destiny. Newton's *Principia* would make a poor nursery-book for a child. The child's mind must be approached through his mixed memories of pleasure and pain, and appealed to by the practical interests of the near future. The educationist reminds us that it is almost impossible to teach an ill-nourished, brow-beaten, anxious child, who is bearing a premature burden of distress. And the great truth of our personal redemption is the gateway to all spiritual wisdom and understanding. The mystery of salvation in which our eternal future is implicated must be unveiled to us. The first step for a man in any place or in any century is not to guess about the being, functions, and graded order of angels, but to discover through the appointed methods whether there is anything in God that makes for his salvation and indeed ensures it. However skilfully the Gospel may be preached, its truths are mysteries which may repel us into incredulity, till God makes them luminous to the soul and turns them into an inward, vivid, living experience of salvation. We may even be convinced that God's gracious counsels are world-embracing, but till they are set before the inward eyes of the understanding

by the Spirit, guilty fears will weight our hearts, and our tongue will cleave to the roof of the mouth, when we would fain claim our great birthright.

The term "full assurance" is welded to three different graces in the epistles—"*the full assurance of faith*," "*the full assurance of hope*," and "*the full assurance of understanding*." Faith is the spiritual affection which takes hold of Christ as a Saviour from sin, so that the soul can rise above the condemnation and evil bondage of the past. The full assurance of faith is realised when the human struggle of the process is forgotten, and God approves and authenticates faith by His own act and help. Faith is thus lifted up into a great conscious victory over fear and misgiving. Hope is that form of faith which takes hold of the glorified Christ at the right hand of God, and finds in His presence there, a pledge of the disciple's coming participation in the blessedness of heaven. Its province is to deal with the far-off future. Hope reaches the height of a full assurance when God authenticates it with His own direct seal. It is then no longer an act of the devout imagination, but a vision in which God enshrines Himself, and the Amen of the Mediator is heard. It may be questioned whether "the full assurance of hope" conveys an irrevocable pledge that he who possesses it shall never fall from grace; but it does at least imply that conscious union with Jesus Christ is an earnest of participation in His endless honour and blessedness. The assurance of understanding

is such a present conscious apprehension of God in Christ as gives insight into the Divine counsels of grace, and enlists the reason on the side of faith. It does not remove the mysteries, but shows that those mysteries are the unknown depths of a love which ministers to the joy and not to the fear of the human heart. When this assurance reaches its fulness, God becomes a present luminous experience, self-declared, as essential salvation. Such a knowledge of God and His Son whom He hath sent is eternal life, and the life is its own witness. Forgiveness of the past and hope of the coming immortality are both included in this knowledge, involved and infolded in a present beatific consciousness of God.

These experiences of grace so differently described are essentially one, although they may be conveyed through separate faculties of the mind. Faith seems to employ the affections of the heart in its exercise, hope the powers of imagination, and understanding the gift of reason; and yet these are but different gateways by which help comes to us when we receive salvation. These various capacities of the mind and heart, through which the Divine Spirit brings home to us the blessing of assurance in its manifold forms, may be coincidently or successively actuated by God's hidden working within us. Perhaps these phases of assurance may alternate in their ascendency at different stages of our religious history.

There were special reasons why the apostle desired that in the churches to which he was writing this full assurance should assert itself pre-eminently in all the ranges of the intellectual life. They had been distracted by the dreaminess of an unsound, speculative philosophy, and the best remedy was a clear understanding of the truths of salvation, set up by the Divine Spirit in the mind, a knowledge with God's eternal counsels of redemption for the substance of its massive certainties. The most curious and audacious gnosticisms cannot distract or demoralise the man whose reason God holds spell-bound, and whose voids of soul He fills with the munificence of His redeeming truth. His presence becomes both the essence and the incontestable witness of salvation.

It has been questioned by some men whether we can have any genuine knowledge of God at all; and if the doubt can justify itself of course it is fanaticism to assume that our minds may be filled with direct and valid intimations of His saving counsels. A famous biologist has said, in one of his essays, that "no drowning sailor ever clung more tightly to a hencoop" than he would cling to "the least proof of an unseen world," if such proof came in his way. This ironside of modern science had great qualities, and was a pattern of intellectual honesty, but possibly he looked for his hencoop from but one point of the compass. He seemed to think that spiritual things could be scientifically discerned, and that was perhaps why he failed to see the ark of refuge into which

Paul was helped in the days of his mental shipwreck. The purely scientific mind is too often like an observatory with only one window in it, so that however wonderful the instrument mounted there, only one hemisphere of life can be swept.

Men with a traditional attachment to Christianity sometimes deny that the knowledge of God's saving will can come through other than indirect and traditional channels. A curious passage in Dr Samuel Johnson's *Table Talk* illustrates his defective view of Christian privilege, and reveals a weakness in much of the churchmanship of his century. In conversation with his friends he one day said, "No rational man can die without uneasy apprehension." Mrs Knowles in reply argued, "The Scriptures tell us the righteous shall have hope in His death." "Yes, madam," said the doctor, "that is he shall not have despair. But consider that his hope of salvation must be founded on the terms on which it is promised, that the mediation of the Saviour shall be applied to us—obedience, and where obedience has failed then as suppletory to it—repentance. But what man can say his obedience has been such as he would approve of in another, or even in himself upon close examination; or that his repentance has not been such as to require being repented of? No man can be sure that his obedience and repentance will obtain salvation." "But Divine intimation of acceptance may be made to the soul," said Mrs Knowles, who tried to press the evangelical view. "Madam, it

may," said the doctor, "but I should not think the better of a man who should tell me on his death-bed that he was sure of salvation." Boswell next steps in to sum up the debate. "Then, sir, we must be content to acknowledge that death is a terrible thing." To which Dr Johnson says, "Yes, sir, I have made no approach to a state which can look on it as not terrible."

Devout soul though Dr Johnson might be, and loyal to the authority of the New Testament, one cannot but be thankful that he spent his strength in dictionary-making and criticism rather than in teaching religion. He misconceives the groundwork of the whole subject, and views the sealing of the Spirit as though it were a special compliment God might now and again conceivably bestow upon an extraordinary saint. When God gives Himself to our waiting hearts, so working the persuasion that we are forgiven and saved, He is not asserting the adequacy of our repentance or bearing witness to our works of obedience, but is responding to the mediation of His Son. Some of Samuel Johnson's contemporaries were preaching a better gospel, and their message was the force that renewed the nation.

When the shadow of death was stealing into the vicarage at Hursley, John Keble, the poet-saint of the Oxford movement, writes a letter to Pusey which seems to be darkened by the same defective view. "You have heard rightly; my dear wife is, I believe, soon to be taken away from me. Pray that

it may not be for ever." Such a sentence may have been penned in a mood of depression, but the solicitude he felt about future reunion seems to connect itself with an ascetic discipline of self-abasement, the gloom of which shut out all sense of the full assurance of faith, hope, and understanding.

In the epistles the doctrine of assurance is not made to rest upon man's acts, although, of course, he may obscure and exclude its blessed light, but upon the grace and power of Jesus Christ as the absolute representative of the Father; and to doubt the privilege is to dishonour the Mediator. There is an obvious correspondence between "the riches of the full assurance of understanding" and "the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" in Jesus Christ, with which the apostle completes his sentence. In those treasures the followers of Jesus Christ have the deepest practical interest. Assurance comes to them through His insight into God's unfathomable mind of love; and the assurance is described as a vast enrichment, because it is conveyed from His countless treasures. Those treasures are lodged within Him for the ends of His redemptive stewardship, and the most priceless piece of knowledge He can entrust to me is that I am God's reconciled child, and that I have sensible communion with His presence. There are secret things He rightly reserves to Himself, but we are His friends, and all things tending to confirm and enlarge our sense of privilege and inspire us for better service He declares unto us by

the Spirit. Would He not feel Himself under a reproach if, possessing an infinite munificence of knowledge and wisdom Himself, He left us to grope vainly after a God and an assured salvation?

It is through our union with Christ that the treasures hidden in His mysterious nature are conveyed to us, and become "the riches of the full assurance of understanding." He is not inaccessible and uncommunicative, covering up from His disciples facts perfectly familiar to Himself, which might greatly help and comfort them. If it could be proved that reefs of pure gold stretched beneath the floor of an ocean to which no bottom had been found, it would not make the slightest flutter in the money market, for with our present appliances it would be impossible to reach the precious metal. It would do our trade and commerce just as much good if such reefs were at the centre of the dog star. If Jesus cannot and does not bring His wealth of wisdom and knowledge within reach of believing disciples, and assure them of the deep and unchanging love through which they are forgiven and made sons of God, it perhaps does not profoundly concern them to hear, "it pleased the Father that in Him should the fulness dwell." The interest of the statement in this case is only abstract. But we are in fellowship with Christ, and the relationship is not honoured if we are tormented and in part disabled by a distressing uncertainty which it is within His power to remove.

Assurance cannot be abounding if it is based upon anything in us. It is determined by the Spirit which is in Christ Jesus, and this Spirit never permits the sincere man to be self-deluded. "If in anything ye are otherwise minded, even this shall God reveal unto you." This full assurance of knowledge is not a beatitude earned by works of righteousness, but the free gift of the all-sufficient Lord to His humble and believing followers.

What a pathetic sight to see children from the poorer districts of London with pinched faces and thread-bare garments at the Tower, gazing wistfully through steel bars into the cages where the crown jewels are placed! Poor things, they will never be the richer for that brief holiday glimpse of royal silver, gold, and precious stones. And if the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in Christ are for Him alone, and the secret of salvation is locked within iron gates for which no key is forthcoming, our position is just as sad. But these treasures were put into Christ's humanity that they might enrich us with the assured knowledge of salvation. We are not pale, emaciated ascetics looking at His priceless wisdom and knowledge from the outside.

The treasures are not hidden in Him so that they may be kept from those whose flesh He has taken upon Himself, but rather that redeemed men may come to His feet and find the enrichment He confers. If the mysteries, of which He

is the steward, can gladden, purify, and consecrate the heart and awaken songs of praise to a pardoning God, we may boldly claim the revelation of these mysteries. No father or friend would keep from a sick child the sure hope of recovered health for the sake of making the little sufferer obedient to the physician's instructions. To put the child into suspense, with the view of saving him from being too venturesome, would work more injury by depressing the spirits, than schooling him into a minute observance of the precepts of doctor and nurse could possibly do good. When we are honestly contrite, and with all our hearts trust His Son for salvation, it cannot be God's will that we should be tormented by uncertainty. He has given power to His Son to declare our absolution, the grace and wisdom of the Son are never at fault in the exercise of this ministry, and the presence of the infinite love in the central consciousness is the highest form of assurance. Contrasts of poverty and wealth in common life make us feel that the moral and economic conditions under which society is organised are criminally askew. It is a shame to see streets of superb and well-lighted mansions on whose pavements ill-clad children shiver as they sell matches and evening papers. When the master is a millionaire and his dependants are less decently housed than dogs, on one side or the other, there is something seriously amiss. If there be in Jesus

treasures of wisdom angels cannot count, and I, the least worthy of His followers, am racking my heart with the unanswered problem of personal salvation, there must be grave faults in the economies under which I am placed, or an obstructive impenitence in my own heart. In Him we have effectual far-reaching wisdom, and His gift does not exhaust itself when I begin to mourn my sin and trust in Him for redemption. He imparts the wisdom which enables us to read God's heart as well as our own, and thus are we sealed unto the day of redemption. This assurance is a foundation grace of the true Christian life. Love to God is scarcely possible till we have an immediate and authentic intimation that He has removed our death sentence, and is seeking to save us to the end. The degree of our love to God, and the fulness of our assurance will, as a general rule, be in strict ratio to each other.

This assurance, inasmuch as it corresponds to the treasures of wisdom in Christ, ought not to be meagre, stinted, precarious. The apostle is emphatic, almost to the point of redundancy. "The riches of the full assurance of understanding." Riches release from misgiving and painful care, or at least they are reputed to have this effect. Those who have great possessions are not troubled by fluctuations of commercial prosperity. Of course they need to be watchful, but it would be insanity to live overshadowed by the daily dread of the workhouse. Riches enlarge the ranges of human interest and enjoyment. If a man

likes books, paintings, flowers, foreign travel, with a sure and sufficient income, he can gratify his taste at will. His life shines with splendour. He can work out his ideas more entirely than ancient conquerors. All the forces of the world seem to wait upon the man of fortune. Proof against wild adventures and perilous speculations, he is not driven to take the risks which often tempt the man who has large claims and an inadequate income.

In the spiritual realm the riches of the full assurance of understanding will do such things for us and far more. The fear which hath torment is out of place in our lives, and can only assail us as a temptation. Whilst final failure is not impossible, and to watch and pray will be urgent duties to the end, it is a grotesque insanity for the man who has "the riches of the full assurance of understanding" to terrorise his soul with the messages of wrath aimed at the man who is facing towards darkness and destruction. For God to reject patient, sincere contrition, and our ever-struggling confidence, is impossible. With such riches in the soul, each day yields up the blessing with which it is fraught, and the cup overflows like the Psalmist's. Disqualifications for usefulness disappear, and out of our resources others are helped. Life takes on new grace, beauty, strength. The possessor of these riches is proof against the hazards of sophistry and guess-work. The wiles of the charlatan prevail against the man whose religion is a flimsy tissue of traditional

dogmas or untested opinions. If Paul's desire for the churches to which he was writing is fulfilled afresh in you, the perturbations of the hour will cease to trouble, and pretentious conjecture will no longer dizzen or betray. "The riches of the full assurance of understanding."

The apostle speaks of this exalted experience as one of the blessed consummations of Christian fellowship. "Knit together in love until all riches of the full assurance of understanding." All spiritual gifts have a social intention and outlook, or they would belie their Divine origin. This privilege is not meant for rare and solitary saints, and he strangely misinterprets its significance who asserts that the professed consciousness of it is the mark of a conceited and self-exalting Pharisaism. It is through mutual sympathy and helpfulness that the blessing is retained, and others are led into participation with it. Civilisation itself begins in brotherhood and co-operation, and man's ascent into the heights of religious life follows the same order. It is said that certain native tribes in the forests of the Congo have so accustomed themselves to walk through the gloom and tangle of the forest in single file, that they cannot shake off the habit when they emerge into sunshine and the open fields. Men sometimes walk apart from each other through life, and it is the sign they belong to the realms of gloom and perplexity, rather than to the realms of fruitfulness and spiritual sunshine. If

there be no tender, well-knit, mutual fellowship, we shall not prove ourselves children of the illuminated kingdoms which rejoice in the light of God's countenance. The atmosphere of brotherly love favours this high experience. It is only when envy, suspicion, tumult subside, and heart is grappled to heart, that the Divine presence so enshrines itself as to become self-attesting salvation. Where love is wanting God hides His face, and the experience is withheld. All the tempers which breed reserve, or repel men of the same religious beliefs from each other, keep back the birthright. Where Jesus dwells, the Father, whose manifested presence is the most complete expression of assurance, comes likewise; but Jesus does not dwell where separating gulfs yawn between those whom He is seeking to make one in the common faith and the common salvation. John correlates these two things in precisely the same way as Paul. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." Perhaps in our own day we shall not recover this "full assurance" till we recover it through a revival of the simple, tender, sympathising spirit of the primitive Christian brotherhood. "Knit together in love unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding."

This full assurance of knowledge is vital to spiritual prosperity. Weakness in temper and languor in service arise from the lack of this high experience. On the lower side of this line lies religious dreamland,

and on the upper religious reality. A Christian who has not reached this high persuasion, especially if he lives in the din of strife, is little better than a devout heathen, who may perhaps participate vaguely in the benefits of an unknown redemption. The preaching of the Gospel is to create within men the present sense of God, salvation and eternal life, and it has not yet accomplished its mission in the man who is a stranger to this clear, far-reaching, vital consciousness. We cannot heartily serve a God of whose counsels concerning us we are in doubt. Assurance makes all the difference between a spiritual and an unspiritual man, a weakling and a champion, an inglorious mute and a great confessor. Faith is crowned by assurance and gains therein its Divine credentials. "The riches of the full assurance" reinforce from Divine sources above us, our poor, struggling human faith; and the earthly and heavenly horizons here begin to meet and melt into each other.

What a melancholy contrast does our age present to the ideal of attainment here presented! We find an ever-crying dearth of inwrought, Divinely authenticated, invincible conviction. We need a religion which has passed out of the guess and peradventure stage. We are mocked with the sham certainties of official dogmatism and infallibility, the full-blown fruit of centuries of uncritical assumption and administrative pride. We may have our certainty, it is said, with all the rest of mind it brings, if we will accept

intermediate witnesses, links in a chain, a precarious succession. But we want to share the blessedness of those whose own eyes saw and whose own ears heard. It is the appointed province of evangelical religion to diminish the area of haze, unsettlement, dubiousness, and to understay the spirit with strong, bed-rock convictions. If religion is not pure midday sunlight it is worthless, and must rank with the disputable philosophies only. Guesses must be changed into knowledge, anticipations into sensible experience, forecasts into instantaneous spiritual history. Our experiences are too often like doubtful mornings which end in cloud. Little bits of sunshine flicker on the hills; a few squares of field are spread with a cloth of gold, all too soon folded away; gleams of dismembered rainbow appear in the black north-west, blush for a moment and are gone. And at last the sickly struggling sunshine is chased away by the surging storm and hides itself, though not forever. Many chapters of our inner biography are akin to these days of confused sunshine and storm, bits of dissolving splendour, stray visions of the covenant rainbow, the momentary flash of God into our souls followed by haze; and little of that Divine dayspring which shines more and more unto the perfect day. "God is light. . . . If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another."

VI.

THE BUFFETINGS OF FAITH.

"Fight the good fight of faith."—1 TIMOTHY vi. 12.

IN our modern speech we have come to use the word "faith" in two different senses. We describe by it that spirit of trust in God which is the key to salvation—the great principle informing and controlling genuine Christian life in all its stages. And this without doubt was the first meaning of the word. The word "faith" is also used to denote the body of doctrine accepted in common by the disciples of Jesus Christ—those dogmatic interpretations of the New Testament teaching which have been built up in part by intellectual methods. In this secondary signification the word is a synonym for religion and formulated religious beliefs.

It is open to question whether the New Testament ever uses the word in this later ecclesiastical sense. Perhaps the term may have acquired such a shade of meaning by the time of Jude, who speaks of "the faith once for all delivered unto the saints." But even in such a text faith need not be taken as the

exact equivalent of a minute and specific creed. An examination of the writings of St Paul will serve to show that he, at least, rarely if ever uses the word in this later and less vital sense. For him faith is moral rather than intellectual in its basis, and has its home and anchorage in the affections of a renewed heart.

Some Biblical scholars whose names are not without weight, say that in the text before us the term is used in this secondary objective sense. "Fight the good fight of faith" means "Be valiant for the cause of Christ and contend for all the truths involved in the apostolic testimony. Never lack zeal for the doctrines which are at the basis of Church life and fellowship." But it is obvious that here at least the term cannot be so used. The parallelism "Lay hold on eternal life" clearly implies that final salvation is the recompense of those who quit themselves like men in this conflict. Paul, however, cannot intend to say that the crown will be given to tough controversialists or to the men who battle doughtily for the postulates upon which Christ's kingdom is founded. Upon such an interpretation some despicable characters would fill honourable thrones in heaven. It puts the Christian apologist upon much the same level as the follower of Islam who expects Paradise as he dies fighting sword in hand for prophet and Koran. The word as here used is not emptied of its first significance, and we must think of that faith by which Paul describes the campaign, to which he urges his young friend and companion, as an inward, personal principle,

precious as the soul it has purified and saved. In the clause following the text "faith" is obviously identified with the "good confession" borne "before many witnesses"; but the subject-matter of that confession is a personal experience, together with the Gospel facts authenticated in that experience, and not a tradition. The faith for which he had to wage unresting warfare was a larger ramification of that which was the motive power of his conversion—a faith which united him not only to the Redeemer but also to the Redeemer's work, and was to be continuous through the successive acts of his vocation.

God in His wisdom has seen fit to determine that this root principle of the spiritual life shall be proved, strained, and perfected, by much buffeting and contradiction. He who has come into the possession of faith and would keep it to the end, finds himself a combatant, whether he desires the part or not. A continuous faith is incompatible with quiescent moods and an unruffled career. Faith, whether we think of it as a life implanted within ourselves and our fellow disciples, as the secret and the earnest of a character to be achieved, and of a providential work to be fulfilled; or whether we think of it as the burden of a testimony we must bear to our contemporaries, thrusts us into fierce and perhaps daily struggle. It marks out for us, clear as the lines drawn on a military map, an area within which our inward and outward strife must be passionate, if we are to guard that which is even more sacred than

hearth and home. The Christian life, in all its parts, periods, and contrasted stages, maintains itself through a struggle against seen and unseen forces which menace our faith. The resistance which challenges us to heroic effort may approach us from many sides. Problems which take their rise in the sphere of the intellect, problems furnished by our own temperament and history, problems which emerge within the home, problems inseparable from the disjointed and chaotic condition of the world around us, problems forced upon us by the hostility of large sections of the human race towards God and His ways, surprise us into pain, and tend to make our faith a wrestling and an agony. The peace and joy of faith are preached to us in such winning accents, that we are prone to overlook the fact that this cardinal faculty of the renewed being is providentially designated to alert, strenuous, life-long militancy. We are quite scriptural when we aspire to "the rest of faith"; but the term has its limitations, for "the rest" denotes release from fear, turmoil, barren, vexing struggle, and the tormenting condemnation characteristic of the unrepentant years. But in its attitude, both towards the present and the future, faith is meant to be an intense, sustained, valiant, pauseless advance, a pressing forward in face of much that would keep us back, a pressing upward through the down-driving clouds. The spirit of trust to which we are summoned is not all soothing poetry, gracious sentiment, uninterrupted, and speckless sun-

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shine. The temper of the disciple is prevented from settling down into drowsy religious affability. Faith is a receptive faculty of the new life opening the nature to all the gifts of God ; but it needs effort to maintain the receptive habit, and if the habit is lost, whilst we are in moods of spiritual exhaustion produced by ingratitude, discouragement, human provocation, the bounties bestowed without money and without price cannot be freely conveyed to others. Faith itself is a gift of incalculable preciousness, but a gift bestowed to stimulate and embolden the wide ranging activities of the after life.

We receive the gift of faith and all the powers comprehended in it, as native tribes and subject States sometimes receive grants and subsidies from the commanding empires of the world. Such largesses are not voted to tempt the tribesmen into sloth, to entice to luxury and voluptuousness, to smooth the common life into ease and pleasantness, but to enlist the intrepid clans as allies for the maintenance of peace, the suppression of slavery, and the spread of civilisation. The stricken soldier is carried from the heat and din of the battle into the cool hushed atmosphere of the hospital tent, where skilled ministries attend to save him from pain, delirium, and the grave. But he is vouchsafed rest and healing, so that he may by-and-bye go forth to fight his country's battles anew. And faith frees us from wrath, misery, reprobation, so that springs of strength may be opened up within us, and,

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enabling motives of future action, may replenish our characters. Faith does not thrive in a cloister, if, at least, the cloister is a self-chosen retreat from the vexations of life; and the faith which demands discharge from hardship and warfare is destined to languish and die. The stress, discipline, and incitement of conflict, are needed to build up and perfect this principle which is the mainspring of salvation. In some countries there are hereditary fighting castes which tend to wither away when they are deprived of all opportunity for displaying their martial qualities. And faith would shrink into feebleness, atrophy, and exhaustion, unless driven into action by fresh calls upon its strength. We are so apt to look at faith from a selfish standpoint, to think of the inward benefits it brings, rather than to keep in view the life-long struggle to which it impels and commits us. Faith, on its human side, began in an act of will, and dogged perseverance in the exercise of the virtue will always be necessary to its sustained strength and efficacy. It has its passive phases, which alternate with its active and aggressive functions.

We often think that God ought to have made it much easier for us to believe. If faith is the great saving force the New Testament asserts, would it not be well if the intellectual processes which enter into it were less open to controversy? Why should it not have been simple and self-evident as a demonstration in elementary mathemathics? Proof of the great redeeming verities might have been

given which would commend itself to every clear-headed man, no matter what the state of his heart. As things are, even the good man sometimes persuades himself that he cannot believe, and ought not to profess things of which he is only half convinced. That unseen world, which is the object of faith, might have been so presented to the intellect and the natural consciousness, that it would be no longer necessary to use the moral faculties in supplementing apparent limitations in the scheme of Christian evidence. What a different course human history might take if men could be floated into a facile and spontaneous faith as irresistibly as they drift down a summer stream, rather than have to fight their way towards it in the teeth of a tempest. It is true God has given us the Bible, with its consecutive and suggestive histories, and its inspired affirmations to quicken and nourish faith, but a strange Providence seems to have left many ugly stumbling-blocks in our pathway, which threaten to precipitate us into unbelief. Things have been so arranged that a long series of struggles is interposed between the first and the last earthly acts of faith; and an enlarged knowledge of ourselves and the world, yea, even of the Bible itself, often seems to make this vital habit one of increasing difficulty. It was to be a stern contention for Timothy, who, from his infancy, had been brought up in an atmosphere of pure Christian teaching and the scenes of hard, tumultuous service through which

he moved, did not allay the inward strife. Some of his own infirmities dragged back his faith, whilst, at the same time, the more closely he came to know the dominant traits of the races to which he was sent, the more he felt how the resources of his own mind and heart were perpetually drained, and what a task it was to believe in a Saviour who could uplift and sanctify the sceptical and superstitious crowds. Some men boast that they met all the objections to faith in the prime of an early, vigorous, quick discerning manhood, and, save for a few providential crosses, all has been smooth, untroubled movement with them ever since. Such men must have been asleep, or have strayed from the appointed path of service; for, life as God projects it, is an arduous campaign, and the other faculties of the soul will shirk their just duties, unless led by a faith inured to struggle. The exercise of this crucial, all-conquering principle was never meant to be one of the light, facile, unfretting tasks of life.

In the human heart there lies in ambush an insidious force which resists and resents faith, and again and yet again it must needs be trampled under-foot. To walk by faith and not by sight disparages the competence of the senses to guide, and puts a slight upon their part in the economy of our lives. The senses resent the menial place assigned to them, and grow mutinous under the yoke which is put upon them. The natural opposes the intrusion of the spiritual into its ancient domain, just as a suspicious

tribe is set against the presence of a stranger, and seeks to hasten his departure from their borders; and even when the animosity has been temporarily overcome, it will break out again at intervals for years. The personal consciousness has grown up, in close companionship with the flesh, and never seems able quite to shake off the tyranny of its traditional association. This would be so to some extent if the Fall had not given us an ingrained bias towards unbelief, for the difficulty, in a less exaggerated form, is inherent in the compound nature of man. There is sometimes a parallel conflict between the flesh and the higher tastes and pursuits of the intellect, when God and religion do not come into the reckoning at all. We dislike leaving those realms in which the senses gather sweets for our taste, even when we are not vicious, and are slow to turn from the satisfactions pressed upon us. It is as though we had been led to a tempting banquet and had then been resigned into the hands of some grim, cynical janitor to be taken out by a side door. Faith seems to call us away from the good that is nearest to us, and to force into abeyance our first hopes. This conflict is accentuated when this new ruling principle, in the fulfilment of its purifying function in the human soul, beats down our lust and our wantonness. But there is no need to be startled by the difficulties we encounter in maintaining a habit of faith. It is just what we might expect. Reason may sometimes rebel against these methods

of faith by which we have to live the new life, yet not infrequently the flesh prompts it, and is craftily employing an apologist of more reputable rank. Whilst the same ingredients go to make human nature, it must continue to be what it ever has been, and the faith which is our life-duty, will test and strain us to the end. He who came to create faith amongst men demanded self-mortification from His followers, as they stood upon the threshold of the kingdom, because men can only believe and continue to believe as they learn to deny themselves. The early defects and failures of faith in the apostles arose from their secret worldly reservations. And Paul, the chief witness to the doctrine of faith, tells us that in this great fight he had to buffet his body and bring it into subjection.

The bias of society, or to use the old Scriptural term, "the world" must always be against faith, for society is that sense-life which is the antithesis of faith, multiplied a thousand fold, and drilled into a monstrous machine. On such a colossal scale must the conflict with the flesh be continued by this simple spiritual force which has been kindled within us. In our surroundings and social relationships we inevitably find more or less antipathy to the instincts of an active, expanding spiritual consciousness. We are in one and the same world as the heroes of faith described in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and a truce between the church of believers and the world of the unregenerate is a

treachery to our trust. Faith can make no compromise with "the lust of the flesh," "the lust of the eye," and "the pride of life," magnified to imperial proportions, and clothed with the most bewitching splendour the prince of the air can conjure into view. Such a compromise is suicide, and faith is doomed to perish unless it can be always alert, daring, combative. The world is precluded by the elemental passions which surge through it from offering a genial home to faith, and the prejudice it never fails to show against men of faith need not surprise us. The fitful friendliness of the world to vital faith is an affectation, and just as hostile as its open challenge. Its kingdoms and its social orders are always a peril to trust in God, because they express so much that is latent in the flesh, which the less spiritual side of our personality will at once condone and approve. Do not imagine that the world which once frowned on spiritual faith has undergone an inward revolution because now and again it achieves a smile, for its smile is after all thinly-veiled indifference and contempt. To exercise this central principle of the spiritual life is just as much a fight for us as for Paul and Timothy in those stormy days when they sojourned amongst fanatical heathen, or faced peril and treachery at the hands of their own countrymen; since the unbelief with which they had to contend is normal and aggressive in human history still. The faith, which is a pleasing sentiment, a burst

of glad emotion, a rapturous sweetness, like the love of the Canticles, and nothing more, cannot possibly survive in the world we know. It is said that in some tropical forests growth is so swift and competition so merciless that a plant must either fight or resign itself to extinction. And in a world rank, matted, overspread with unbelief it is thus with faith. It must strenuously contend or ignobly perish, and that is a part of the Divine order.

And worst of all it sometimes seems as though God were more concerned to prove our faith by distressing enigmas than to disentangle it from the embarrassments which beset its progress and arrest its due perfection. Difficulties which take their rise in acts of the Divine sovereignty strain to the snapping point our implicit confidence in the promise of redemption. He comes, as He came to Jacob of old, not in the guise of an ally, but as one with whom we need to wrestle in the darkness. He shows no wish to smooth all difficulties out of our pathway, and make faith easy and lightsome. The scenes through which He sees fit to bring us are not such as compel faith, whether we will to exercise it or not. On the contrary, he puts us into straits, freezing isolations, mental torture chambers, where it seems impossible for us to be otherwise than bitter and sceptical. We are no longer in an environment like that of our happy childhood, where a temper of unquestioning trust was as natural as frolic and laughter. Our lot may be cast where we are bereft of that peculiar

sympathy which is an auxiliary to spiritual faith. He brings us into the midst of snares and pitfalls as though He were our adversary, and it seems a thousand chances to one that we can escape without loss of this very virtue upon which He has made our salvation to turn. He does not allow us an easy victory. Faith is a perpetual struggle, and death is the last act of the campaign—the black problem that baffles us, the portent which seems to belie His promise, making the hope of the gospel superb folly. Death, like a skeleton Goliath, jeers at God's children as they step down into the valley. When the Christian sinks into a mournful and troubled sleep, he has to hold fast to the persuasion that waking will be in realms of light, that through the disfigurement of corruption the body shall pass to its royal investiture, that hideous graves hold the seeds of a blessed resurrection. The churchyard is sometimes the Armageddon where our faith has to fight its last desperate and appalling battle. To the very end we shall have to put all our force into the fight. God Himself means it to be a testing conflict, just as much as the Tempter who seeks through these successive siftings to spoil us of our faith; and the faith into which the vital vigour of our manhood does not enter has in the end little or no value before God.

And this should be no surprise or offence to us. If we look at the subject on all its sides we may see many and sufficient reasons why it has pleased God

to keep our half-grown faith in spheres of tussle and difficulty.

The hard and ungenial conditions against which we inwardly rebel protect our faith against effeminacy and decay. In the history of nations the height of luxury becomes the starting-point for a descent into ignominy and nothingness. An environment of seductive softness is the nursery of degeneration. The strong Roman empire perished when the Romans themselves became idle and ease-loving, living upon the spoils of conquest, and allowing their battles to be fought by mercenaries. A few months of ease soon prove fatal to the strenuous business man, who puts off his burdens to live the rest of his life by a snug fireside, forgetting the storms without. Men are kept fresh and strong by the struggles in which they are taking part; and when there is no loss by exertion, there is no wholesome repair. And the principle is true in religion. Do not cry out for release from the struggles and the controversies, in whose whirl your faith has to fight for its very life, for this is God's way of protecting your faith from degeneration. A spiritual hedonism sometimes insinuates itself into the Church, which destroys all the grit and fibre of character. Men now and again come under our notice who are sybarites in their piety, clothed with fine linen and faring sumptuously; men who have lost all sense of the fact that faith is a warfare to be waged. Some of the apocalyptic forecasts imply that

in serene millennial days, when there is nothing left to test and oppose the trust of the heart, a new apostacy will begin. And this is a danger inseparable from the outward growth of Christianity, for the very movements which tend to popularise religion, and give it a higher place in the appreciation of our contemporaries, tend to abate the healthy sternness of this strife, and to permit a confession of faith less chivalrous in its temper, and less incisive in its outward forms. But God thrusts us again and again into the fray, when we think ourselves entitled to an honourable discharge. If our lower faculties can only be kept keen-edged, supple, and strenuous by hindrances, impediments, and antagonisms, some such rule must surely apply to those higher faculties, of which faith is the crowned king. God will not let this regal power degenerate, but will so order our lot that it will be proved, developed, and built up into virility and perfect strength by repeated conflicts.

It is said that the action of the wind, as it moves through the grass of the meadows, rushes amidst the woodland trees and frets itself against rocks and hills, produces much of the electricity with which the atmosphere is stored. We see there one of Nature's own dynamos at work; and the endless frictions, only just perceptible to the senses, contribute to the well-being and vitality of the world. And the ceaseless frictions to which our faith is subject, tend to call forth forces which keep character from decay,

and vitalise in inscrutable ways the believing communities around us.

That our highest faith should be evoked through conflict accords with some of the elemental instincts which are interwoven with the roots of our life. In every strong character there are strains of pugnacity, and some men reach the zenith of their power in opposition. It is only the weak and the weary, the delicate and the morbidly sensitive, who recoil from the ordeal of combat. Every string in such temperaments is jarred by any hint of dispute or contradiction, but these mental conditions are obviously akin to nervous exhaustion and disease. The fighting instinct, it is true, takes vicious forms, but its basis is the sense of strength and the conscious assurance of unknown reserves. The self-respecting man does not care for the tests by which he is to be proved and classified amongst his contemporaries to be made too easy. The engagement in which the enemy flies like coveys of game before the sportsman, offers no scope for prowess, and no occasion for just renown. The apostolic allusions to games and contests, wrestlings and warfare, show that the forces of emulation which pulsate restlessly in our blood can be transmuted into spiritual qualities; and the kindled consciousness of power which makes the soldier, can contribute to the nurture of faith. Our trust in God and the victories of His cause, rises to nobler heights with the difficulties which appear in our lot, and amidst the contradic-

tions of sinners; and our hearts would not be satisfied unless this foundation-principle of character could show itself strong and valiant on many a difficult field. When the great disarmament has come, and the world is changed into a sphere of faith, the reserve of strength, of which the combative instinct is the sign, will find new and nobler exercise.

The best qualities of faith are drawn out in the conflicts which are providentially prepared for us. Faith does not show its most heroic side when it first trusts God in Christ for immunity from wrath and condemnation. Not only has it to subdue indwelling evil, but to broaden out the sympathies into active co-operation with all the work of God's kingdom; and this gives to God's servants the pregnant opportunities of their lot. The stress under which primitive man found himself was one of the causes which helped to convert him from a mere hunter into a founder of civilisations. We can never know our debt to those hot fierce pressures in our lives which we at first are tempted to resent as the work of a malign fate. Children of straitened circumstances are beginning to win the best prizes of scholastic life, and they well deserve them. The shrewdest inventors have often been struggling operatives. Dominant personalities do not grow where there are no difficulties, any more than the cedar of Lebanon will flourish side by side with the palm and the pomegranate in the hot plain. And what is true in common things applies to religious character,

and to the life-principle out of which religious character grows. In this exhortation, Paul has in view the virtues of which he has been speaking in the preceding verse — righteousness, godliness, love, patience, meekness. Faith is the secret force behind all these aspects of character, and the testing of character is the testing of faith by many forms and methods. Opposition is necessary to bring out the best fibre in some types of men. The brain becomes clear, the will resolute, and the forces of the life fall under command, when the sound of battle is in the air. Controversy, alas, has become wedded to ignoble tempers, but it has cleared many an issue into unambiguous noonday, and shown uncommonly fine strains in human life. The faith which never has to contend is of a poor sample, and will do little to enrich character, or add splendour to the recompense. In one of his delightful books Richard Jeffreys tells us that the old-fashioned countryman used to plant his walnut trees in ground with a north-eastern aspect. If planted in genial and sheltered nooks, it blossomed too soon, and got nipped by untimely frosts. He was a true friend to his trees, and led them to bear abundant fruit and yield noble timber. Bleak, stern conditions, with a minimum of seductive sunshine, often suit the great potentialities of faith, and help their Divine unfolding. Faith comes to its best through conflict, and this means that the entire character, which is purified and built up by faith, attains at the same time its rarest excellence.

God permits warfare and conflict to challenge our confidence in Himself, because His deepest treasures of help can only be opened up to us in the crisis of our need; and such help is received through the faith which has been made strong by hardness. If He who inspires and safeguards our faith were to keep us in those smooth, stormless, well-sunned enclosures, where we should like to live our lives, He would limit His own opportunities of self-revelation to us. Faith is the faculty which apprehends the unseen; and whilst our faith is devoid of exercise and discipline, the unseen seems a very little part indeed of the real universe. The grace and the help that are hidden in its incalculable immensities, can only be touched by the faith that has become dauntless and full-statured through many a sharp struggle. By continued wrestlings, this great God-created principle comes to a surer consciousness of its own power and the things it can achieve through Christ Jesus. If the scenes of trouble and conflict through which God's servants of old battled could be blotted from the pages of the Bible, how much of God's glory would be left there? It is the oft-contested and the much-exercised faith which wins the richest apprehension of God.

The matchless prizes God has in reserve for us cannot be bestowed till faith has attained strength and valour through the vexed and the testing years. The sovereigns of earthly kingdoms reserve their highest honours for those who distinguish themselves

in the hazards and hardships of war. Sometimes the old orders seem stale and insufficient, and new decorations have to be devised for the heroes who have surmounted difficulties which thwarted their predecessors. And God crowns with rare, fresh splendour the faith which persists and achieves through much buffeting and conflict. To awaken within us this saving and uplifting principle, and then to allocate our faith to spheres of congenial, unbroken quiet, would have been to circumscribe our opportunities of distinction, and to put a petty term to the promise of our destiny. Faith must be allowed to unfold itself to the uttermost, for it is the soul of every other virtue, and it finds its largest opportunities when events arise and issues are raised which tax its strength and incite it to feats winning the high praises of heaven.

Faith cannot always be leaning like the beloved disciple on the bosom of the Lord. It must wield the sword, although not that forged at the smithy from which Simon Peter got his weapon. Perhaps we sometimes cry out for conditions under which this long-dragging struggle will cease. We do not wish to be so fiercely exercised at every stage of our religious history. Faith, we think, ought in due time to become like the business built up and organised through a long term of years by the merchant, and acquire a self-propelling power, a momentum which will relieve us from the strain felt at the beginning, an animated mechanism that will

go on without the lavish expenditure of force put into it at first. We want to bring about a truce which will relieve us from the old tension. It is only just we should have respite from the fiery aggressiveness which was one of the obligations of early Christian manhood. We lose the temper of fight and grow tame, docile, chastened, subdued. After the conflicts of many years surely we might be allowed a serene and undistracted eventide. Our religion seems to exact more from our spiritual resources than ever. Such terms and stipulations however, so welcome to the flesh, would entail loss and spiritual lapse. There is no short service in this crusade, and faith must be an earnest strife to the end. We need to keep undiverted minds. There must be no digressions which make us less fit for this sharp and solemn conflict. If we are men of resolute faith, this is the one fact we must set before ourselves.

The most Divine work is that which makes the largest demand upon our faith, and is clearly the work God's own hand has assigned us. In the present half-believing age we are tempted to concentrate our strength upon work the benefits of which are immediate and visible. The man who loses some part of his faith often turns his back upon purely spiritual tasks, and sets himself to secular philanthropies which promise speedy and immediate transformations. Whilst we must never disparage gracious social enterprises, or think of them as of

inferior sacredness, the highest tasks are those which demand the most gigantic faith, and force us into arduous conflict. All true and holy work which blesses the race of man is a strife. In no other terms can we describe the career of the apostle Paul. He was ever looking wistfully into the future, living not for the passing hour but for the after generations; and there was only one way by which he could do this, the way of faith. His life was heroic and fruitful in proportion to his faith, and faith to him was often a severe conflict, as it must be to us who work under less stern but perhaps more seductive conditions. If we would live holy and profitable lives we must wage this unresisting warfare, and in the teeth of counter-influences leagued against us in formidable array, must believe desperately and believe always. "Fight the good fight of faith."

VII.

TYPES OF UNAVAILING FAITH.

"The devils also believe and tremble."—JAMES ii. 19.

THE two New Testament writers who teach the doctrine of justification in contrasted, and what some have thought conflicting, aspects, were outside the circle of discipleship during the lifetime of our Lord. The protest of James against a faith which was supposed to have saving efficacy, whilst it did not, at the same time, issue in works of righteousness, may have been called forth by laxities in the churches with which he was in immediate contact. But differences in the personal histories of these inspired teachers, perhaps, furnish a fuller interpretation of the fact that they approach this crucial doctrine from different sides. Paul, the persecuting fanatic, arrested and brought into a full experience of the grace of the Gospel without any preparatory effort of his own, is transported with thoughts of the freeness of God's mercy, and his mind is completely possessed by the truth that release from condemnation is received through faith alone. James, a Nazarite of scrupu-

lously regulated life, and a witness, whilst yet in partial unbelief, of the Lord's wonderful works and of His yet more wonderful holiness, may have found in his personal history that the exercise of faith went on side by side with the cultivation of righteousness. For him at least faith could not be separated for a moment from the complete round of moral precepts. His own faith was not constrained by signs and wonders, but was the free affection of a mind that chose to seek after light in the pathway of common moral duties.

James, like the rest of the New Testament writers, assumes the existence of fallen spirits. Some of us are perhaps a little afraid of such an idea at the present time. In subscribing to it, may we not make ourselves ridiculous by adopting into the confession of our faith the grotesque and uncanny conceits of medieval legends, picture-books, and church frescoes? It is not necessary to argue this question just now. Evil personalities afford just as much evidence of their existence as good, and it is better to recognise that unseen orders of evil spirits may work behind the scheme of the universe, than to stultify our conceptions of God as scientific necessarians often do, by making Him the author of unrighteousness, and then end up by saying that God, if there is a God, cannot be intelligibly conceived. Man is not the only being in the universe, and the classification of character we find in the visible world may have its parallel in the invisible. If from the gleams of good-

ness in Nature we infer the dominion of a spirit of Divine beneficence, a contemplation of the shadow and moral catastrophe it contains may remind us of the presence and operation of corrupt and unholy spirits. James makes the unseen hosts of darkness types of an unwilling and ineffectual faith. Their creed up to a certain point is entirely valid, but it is compulsory, repugnant, ineffectual, and fails to free them from a most mournful doom. "The devils also believe and tremble." And unless our faith have in it nobler qualities than theirs it will be equally futile.

The faith of devils does not carry with it the will, enlist the affections, and change the spirit of the life, and cannot therefore bring salvation.

The faith of devils is grounded in compulsion rather than in free moral choice. They believe in spite of themselves. Their assurance that there is one Supreme God is not a state of mind into which they have been carried by the set of their own sympathies and inclinations. They believe, because that constitution of things in which their lives are centred, leaves no room for denial; and they would far rather believe otherwise. They belong to spheres of being in which the fact of God's existence is forced upon them, just as faith in the objects of the external universe is forced upon us by the five senses. It is not a matter of choice with us whether we believe in sun and stars, rocks and rivers, fields, woods, birds, beasts, and men like ourselves. Faith in

the existence of these forms which constantly present themselves to our perceptions, is scarcely a process in which the will is concerned. No alternative is open to us, and when a man denies these things, and seeks to replace them by images of his own imagination, we know that he has been either taking drugs or is ready for the asylum. Fallen spirits belong to an unseen universe, and are bound to accept the elemental facts upon which it rests. It is not possible to make the doctrine of God a topic for ingenious speculation only. For them all agnosticism is out of the question. In that sphere no one is sufficiently clever or audacious to maintain the negative. No Ingersoll or Haeckel has arisen, or is at all likely to arise. It might, perhaps, be possible for them to treat matter as a flimsy illusion, but spirit admits of no denial. Their dogmas are sharper than ours, and cover a wider range. They are in the grip of a cast-iron necessity. Their religion is of the involuntary order. Their faith, such as it is, persists against all choice and inclination. Against the solemn realities which compel recognition they are in chronic insurgency. Belief is thrust upon them, and for that very reason cannot influence character, or work towards moral ends. No faith can guide the life and mould the destiny unless it first enlist the will on its side. The faith of these fallen, impenitent beings is barren, because its exercise is irresistibly constrained.

The scene, in which the Pharisees and Sadducees

came tempting our Lord, and desiring Him to show them a sign from heaven, still repeats itself, with slight changes. The whisper is sometimes heard, perhaps in our own souls, Oh, that we had a religion rid of all the historic uncertainties which attach to its origins. The truths which address themselves to us with such momentous emphasis, and claim Divine authority, have passed through the unstable brains of Oriental mystics, and are recorded in half-faded manuscripts of which cunning monks have been the custodians for centuries. We should feel more confidence if every debateable element could be eliminated. Oh, that the sacred facts for which our faith is solicited had come to us out of an atmosphere disinfected from all myth and legend. We are tempted to say with George Eliot, "everything is perfect in Christianity, but the proof." We want mathematical demonstration, and not high probabilities which leave the final decision to our own judgments, helped perhaps by the moral instincts. So many kinds of proof, none of which apart from the rest is absolute, are intertwined with each other. How easy for God to attest Himself by methods that would exclude all gainsaying, if He would only take the trouble to do so. By one brief unveiling of His presence He could paralyse the world's atheism. A glimpse of some form from the underworld, a syllable from Lazarus to the rich man's brethren, a voice from the heights of heaven, and this long conflict of opinion, these vexatious contro-

versies which eat away the heart of Christendom, these interminable dubitations of the scientists, this idea that the evidence is not quite conclusive which makes so many people proof against the appeals of the Gospel, would be at an end. We are sometimes told that if we will give the spiritualist the attention he deserves, he can swiftly annihilate all the prevailing scepticisms by the manifestations to which he will introduce us. What a gain to the spiritual welfare of our generation! The Church and its representatives would not then need to strive, and strive in vain, to bring men to a belief in eternal things.

When we join ourselves to the company of the Sadducees, and seek irrefutable signs from heaven, murmuring that the methods by which Jesus presents God and immortality to us fall short of absolute proof, is it not clear that we are demanding a necessary and inevitable faith—a faith from which all those moral qualities which go with the personal choice is excluded? In other words, that we desire a faith which is one and the same in its basis with the faith of devils, and have therefore no true idea of its proper function in the spiritual life? Such a faith, if enforced upon men in the present stage of their spiritual development, would not answer the purpose for which God has made this principle the key to our training and salvation. It could not purify men's hearts and transform the world, otherwise it would have long

since regenerated the spirits of evil, and changed the abyss of darkness where they dwell into a vale of paradise, beautiful with flowers. Faith is ethically worthless if it rest entirely upon the testimony of involuntary senses and perceptions. No moral factor enters into the work of the tea-taster as such; or into the task of the man who has to classify pieces of variously-coloured silks. There is no room for an act of ethical choice, since tactile nerves, brain, and mental consciousness are co-ordinated by a mechanical order as rigidly predetermined as the movements of two wheels at the opposite ends of an axle. The process is automatic and irresistible. The faith I have in the bare fact that the physical universe exists, apart from its symbolic associations, has not a grain of moral value about it. In accepting it, no higher spiritual faculty is exercised. A cell filled with carbon and placed in the pathway of the electric current intensifies its effect, and gives rise to those feats of the microphone which astonish us. And it is this interposition of will or choice in the chain of faith through which the moral affinities intensely assert themselves, which is the crucial fact in the efficacy of faith. If faith is a question of pure logic, a process through two premises to a conclusion sure as a shot from a rifled gun to its objective, the locking together of steel links in a chain of scientific argument, the regeneration of the soul can never issue from it. Room for the moral element must always be found

in the faith which saves into a pure and blessed life. That part of a man's faith which is free is vital to his regeneration in the image of God.

We scoff as we read stories of the conversion of Tartar tribes once driven by regiments of Cossack cavalry into the river, to be baptized into the faith of the Greek Church. A faith so enforced can do little to change the characteristic qualities of a race. We feel how misguided was the Claverhouse policy of compelling Scotch Covenanters into Prelacy and Sacramentarianism by spear and matchlock. Most men are enlightened enough to smile at petty persecutions in the villages, where systematic attempts are made to create religious uniformity by expedients which destroy personal freedom. It is not a sincere and efficacious quality of faith which is produced by such methods. And yet in a higher sphere we ask for arguments that will leave no room for choice. God ought to dragoon us into faith by irresistible demonstrations of the supernatural.

Mr Wilfrid Ward has given to the world a little book of dialogues on *The Wish to Believe*. One disputant maintains that the wish to believe leads to an unthinking acceptance of Christianity, and vitiates the popular faith by the partiality it implies; whilst his opponent argues that the wish to believe makes a man careful in scrutinising the ground of his faith, and gives a higher intellectual value to his creed. A yet more vital aspect of the question is passed by in the treatise. Faith gains in moral value through the

wish to believe. The chief virtue of faith in God's sight is that it enlists the will into its activities. Those moods in which we do not wish to believe are hard, bitter, diabolic. The wish to believe is the high feature in our faith which distinguishes it from the bastard faith of devils.

The new beliefs which take possession of men when they exchange the seen for the unseen world are thrust upon them by a resistless destiny, and cannot, therefore, exert any purifying influence upon characters inveterately evil. It has been argued that the recovery of the impenitent may be carried on more victoriously in the life to come than now, because realities will there confront them which will shut out the possibility of scepticism. Some years ago a weekly journal pleaded for the execution of a notorious criminal, on the somewhat curious ground, that it was a kindness to hang him, because after death, when confronted with those realities which are now the objects of a struggling and precarious faith, he would have a better chance of moral improvement. The writer apparently failed to see that the faith which does not start in a sphere of free moral choice is akin to the necessitated faith of devils, and cannot cleanse a corrupted nature.

But the question presents itself, Is not the grace which calls forth faith in God's elect servants sometimes irresistible? Was not faith in the Gospel thrust upon Saul of Tarsus by an overwhelming demonstration which he could not dispute? It came with a blaze

of light and a voice from above which bereft him of strength. The narrative scarcely implies this. These preternatural forces may have abased his pride and made ready for the after-gift, but at the moment his strong personality was too utterly broken down to admit of the exercise of an intelligent and deliberate faith. The vision brought arrest, reflection, self-scrutiny, contrition; and out of these, by quiet processes that gave freedom for the play of the human will, in due time came the faith which saves. Why these three days of dark and silent waiting? Was it not to let the moral nature of the prostrate persecutor have time to deliberate, to give it space for awaking into quiet self-knowledge, and gathering its powers together for a great act of choice? It was at the message "Brother Saul receive thy sight," which was a gracious absolution of the forgiving Master by the lips of a forgiving disciple, that faith drew its first breath, and the scales upon the seared vision, which were brands of the Divine wrath, fell away, and tender, healing light came to both body and soul.

The faith of Abraham derived not a little of its splendid virtue from the devout resoluteness which inspired his response to God's covenant word. It was not thrust upon him by the strong hand of destiny. His outward lot far from constraining belief in God only seemed to discourage it. His trust in the things assured to him by Divine promise was marked by a holy wilfulness. It was uncompelled, a

principle into which choice, affection, character entered, and, therefore, fully and absolutely justifying. The faith of Abraham and the faith of devils are put by St James into contrast with each other. The great patriarch believed by choice, and the spirits of evil believe, compelled by the scheme of things in which their mournful lives are set. An element of free moral selection must enter into the faith which saves.

Another note of futility in this faith of the devils is that it does not include the affections. This, of course, is implied in the statement that true faith must be free, for the highest love is spontaneous and unconstrained. Scoff as we may at the wish to believe, and argue that where it exists there can be no impartial logic, the very wish to believe is a product of those affections which furnish faith with its vital potencies. A brilliant critic, who had cast off the faith of his fathers, once wrote: "Immortality! Beautiful idea! Who first conceived thee? Was it some worthy Nuremberg citizen who, as he sat before his house-door on a warm summer evening, with white nightcap on head, and clay pipe in jaw, thought how pleasant it would be if he could thus vegetate into eternity, without his pipe or his life going out? Or was it a young lover who, in the arms of his mistress, first formed an idea of immortality, thinking it because he felt it, and because he could not otherwise think and feel?" Such a belief is none the worse, but perhaps all the better, because human affections are its allies.

The heart cannot be bad, and is indeed in process of being purified, when it desires immortality and the Great Giver of it. We have, it is true, to believe some things we would rather not believe, but our best instincts contain a logic as sound as that of the reason. It is the bad man, the man who is in revolt against the most sacred relationships of life, who desires a world without God, and a speedy extinction of consciousness. If the faith is to effectually shape the life and character, it must command our human sympathies as well as secure the assent of the reason, and the processes are intertwined.

In these unhappy spirits, whose useless faith James cites as a warning against antinomian looseness, the affections have been inverted by a proud, reckless, pursuit of wrong, there is no craving after God, no desire for conformity to His character, or harmonious relations with His government. The fascination of evil is deep and strange, and in certain natures may destroy all capacity for good. In some lands the drug-sot may be seen shivering in his rags, whilst drifting snows are making ready his mountain grave. He revels in the evil enchantment for which he has sacrificed houses and lands, and feels no drawing towards the warmth of his forsaken home, or the kindness of family and kinsmen. He is self-satisfied as a king on the throne, and has no sense of the picture of misery his gaunt form presents to the eye of the observer. It is a riddle, but no less a

fact, in the story of human degeneration. In the abysses of pain and humiliation, whither the spirits of evil have passed from their high estate, there is no hope, no desire, no solicitation, no vernal longing to yield back the alienated heart to its Maker and its rightful King, but dull, sullen, debased contentment. The belief, however much it may comprehend, is heartless. Through whatever channels this strange faith may come into the being, it does not come through the affections, and cannot take hold upon the loving-kindness of God. It lacks that penitence which is the first movement of an estranged and long-slumbering love towards better things. The faith which saves can no more arise in an obdurate nature, than flame can burn in an atmosphere from which the oxygen has been withdrawn. Moral emotion is the life-blood of saving faith. All the collected beliefs of the universe put into a human soul would fail to bring the experience of salvation, if the love of the heart were divorced from it.

When we go on to say this futile faith, so dramatically described by St James, lacks every element of trust, it is but another form of declaring that love has no place in its exercise. Independence towering into arrogant impiety is the dominant trait of the diabolic character, as it is briefly hinted in the Scriptures. Pride, malignity, self-exaltation, rule those mysterious lives in which evil has reached its awful goal. The angels which kept not their first

estate have lost the power of leaning upon the love of another, and seek their good in defiance, challenge, an obstinate, egoistic separatism incongruous with the lowly rank of created beings. "What have we to do with Thee, Jesus, Thou Son of God?" A loveless nature desires no other love upon which to lean, and resents its presence and activity. There can be no fruit from a sapless faith. One might as well graft fruit-buds into an obelisk of granite, as look for saving faith in a cold, rational nature, wanting the sap of tenderness and sympathy. All the seeds of the earth, scattered over the barren wastes of the moon, would not yield a harvest big enough to save a single ant from starvation; for the moon is said to be a waterless satellite, unwashed by dews and unsoftened by showers. If you could put into a heart, void of affection, all the knowledge possessed by fallen and unfallen angels alike; if you could store it with the ideas and beliefs which are the age-long heritage of principalities and powers, there would be utter spiritual barrenness, because the tender trust rising up out of the affections to vitalise faith would be wanting.

The outward test of the insufficiency of a devil's faith is that it lacks those holy and gracious works by which the saving efficacy of all belief is verified. The practical life is a self-recording mechanism by which we may read the quality of the forces which are working within us. A scrutiny of the daily behaviour and a true introspection will be found to

agree in their results. The will and the affections are the strong moulding principles of character, and till these parts of the unseen life are taken up into our faith, faith cannot begin to regenerate us. The faith that does not melt the character and cast it into worthier moulds, has no place in the redemptive economies of our Lord and Saviour. Faith is worth just as much as it moves and braces a man to do, and if it does not make itself felt in this world, it cannot have any appreciable efficacy in that which is to come. The Prince of Darkness is the leader and the pattern of all antinomians, and sustains the position with consummate skill. He goes just as far in the apprehension of God as finite intelligence can go without sympathy and communion, but his confession of faith has no relation to the ordering of the active life. It belongs to a separate and distinct plane of perception. He and his hosts believe many things we are required to believe, and yet because the choice of the will and the mighty play of sovereign affections do not enter into their faith, they are not one whit the less malignant for their apprehension of these verities, not one shade holier in disposition, nor one step nearer the ascent out of hell. We may well suspect the worth and integrity of our own faith if it leaves us doing the devil's work, perhaps with half-shut eyes, in either our private or public relations. The devil is quite content that his instruments should have an orthodox faith if its

roots are superficial. Such faith is dead and cannot save. Our forefathers were accustomed to cut trees on the twenty-first of December, for it was assumed that at the winter solstice the sap had fallen to its lowest point. If our faith lacks vital constituents and bears not even leaves, it is well for us to be reminded that the crucial line of demarcation is not far away, and that the axe is already laid to the root of the tree.

St James reminds us that this intellectual veneer of faith cannot disguise the malady of a condemned spirit. "The devils believe and tremble." No nature can find satisfaction in that which is violently thrust upon its acceptance. When irrefragable events force a truth upon us, it is a sign that the desires, the sentiments, and all the deeper sympathies have been running in a counter direction. The faith which stops short of engaging the forces of the will, the all-subduing tenderness of the affections, and the allegiance of the practical life and character cannot bring into harmony with God, and such a failure is fatal to serenity of soul. Unless our belief has those elements in it which bring the whole life into conformity with the Divine, we must continue strangers to the deep, satisfying peace which is the heritage of saints. This one-sided faith cannot cast out fear, for it is divorced from love. It leaves behind an intractable sense of antagonism to that which ever is and ever must be, a dizzy dread of the unending fall, a soul into

which the glooms of the bottomless abyss draw down as into a vortex. A demoniac faith conjures up associations of judgment rather than of plenteous forgiveness. It irradiates no space in the life of the soul, yields no compensation for inward pain, saves from no threatening terror, because it fails to save from the power and tyranny of sin. "The devils believe and tremble."

The faith which sums up in its various acts and habits the blended energies of will, heart, and life, gives boldness and consolation in the presence of a holy God. Of course the ravages of disease may seem to present a momentary exception to the law that faith comforts and establishes the soul but such exceptions are not limited to the sphere of experimental religion. The wealthy man in disturbed health may pass his days and nights in dread of the workhouse, yet the possession of riches commonly fortifies against any such fear. God may sometimes choose to prove the fidelity of His servants by allowing a deep darkness to fall upon them; but such instances are rare. The rule is that faith comforts, and when faith fails to do so, if there are no morbid factors at work in either the health or the circumstances, it is defective on its moral side. True faith helps to heal the past enmity between ourselves and God, making us His friends; whilst a mutilated faith leaves us, as it leaves evil spirits, the victims of a distressing dread. If our faith is to save us from

the glooms of condemnation hereafter, it should save us from the shadows now.

When the late General Gordon was leading his "ever-victorious army" against the Chinese rebels, one of the opposing generals thought he would strike dismay into the heart of the gallant Englishman and his troops by a *ruse*. He bought two thousand pairs of European boots, and shod his soldiers with them, hoping the footprints they left behind would convey the idea that he also had a large contingent of foreigners at his service. But the English boot did not mean a Waterloo veteran or a Balaclava hero standing in it. That which is sometimes mistaken for faith may be a miserable, anæmic, nerveless form without conquering power. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Is your religious belief more than an outward transcript; an intellectual impression left upon your plastic infancy by a Creed or a Catechism? Have you the living will and the high, warm, beating heart of the thing, so that you can prevail against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Is your faith sentient? Does it bring every part of your nature into co-operation. Does it work as well in the home, the street, the shop, as in the church? Unless your faith keep you from doing the devil's work in its most respectable disguises, it is not one whit better than his. He is quite content that you should go as far as he goes.

A railway bridge once fell, involving the loss of many lives, because a couple of little air-bubbles had

got into the casting of the girders. Your faith must bear the strain of more momentous issues than the crowded highways over which your fellow creatures pass to their daily toil, for all earthly lives placed side by side in single file cannot count up into one immortality. Are there no bubbles in your faith, no hidden defects that may make it work disaster rather than salvation? Beware of the Creed which is a thing of the lip and of the brain only. "Try your own selves whether ye be in the faith."

Give to faith unlimited sway in your nature. Let it command the will, the affections, the daily manner of life, and you will find in it strength and joy beyond the dreams of the past. Let it be king and not slave. The faith which receives nothing from God is no better than a root of bitterness in the heart which harbours it. Let faith be that of the whole man, that of the understanding of course, but also of the will, of the heart, of the practical conduct; and its satisfactions will be deep as the fountains of Paradise and its recompense loftier than the highest stars.

VIII.

THE ROOT OF OBLIGATION.

"Master, which is the great commandment in the law? And He said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second like unto it is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."—MATTHEW xxii. 36-39.

FROM the time of Moses to the present hour, morning by morning and evening by evening, these words have been on the lips of every devout Jew. For three thousand five hundred years, in times of prosperity and in times of tribulation, has the testimony been heard without ceasing. Of no other religious watchword could the same thing be said. The strains sound through the ages like a Divinely authenticated and undying protest, not only against all systems of idolatry, but against legalism and letter-worship. Religion is love, the love of God and the love of our fellow man, the union of a grateful reverence with a fine human ethic. With this utterance, ever murmuring in Jewish homes through the long centuries, like a cadence of the unwearying ocean, no wonder Jesus should have said, "Think not that I am

come to destroy the law. I came not to destroy but to fulfil."

In the book of Deuteronomy this love is described under three aspects. Matthew follows the writer of that book in enumerating the characteristics of the love required from us. The two other evangelists who record this incident use four terms to emphasise the fact that love must be whole and unreserved. Perhaps the terms more or less overlap each other, and the care shown in heaping them up is to admonish us that nothing must be left out of our devotion to God. We are familiar with the problem novel, which asserts that love is divisible, and that it is possible for men and women to have absorbing mental affinities outside the bonds of the marriage covenant, without falling into moral transgression. The communistic settlements, in which men and women have gathered to carry out these theories, usually prove by a series of inevitable scandals that body, soul, and spirit possess an indivisible life, and that it is not easy to have intellectual, artistic, or sentimental companionships outside the companionship upon which the home rests, without putting the entire destiny into peril. In this primary commandment God insists upon love from all the rational faculties of which we are compounded and implies that love is indivisible and absolute, or it does not exist at all. God's claim is not satisfied unless the intelligence, the emotions and the will merge their powers into a great tribute of devotion. Religion must be a chief

occupation for the reason and the understanding, a passionate affection, a resolute purpose, a perfect obedience of the life.

This demand for an undivided love has its foundation in the unity of the Godhead. "The Lord our God is one Lord." The watchword of heathenism is that there are "gods many and lords many." The logical outcome of such a creed is that the devotion of the worshippers splits itself up into multitudinous streams. When it is assumed that men's destinies are ruled by crowds of unseen spirits, when a pantheon is set up and peopled by promiscuous deities and galaxies of bygone heroes, the homage paid must be meted out according to each person's discretion or caprice. Love, if such a sentiment enters into heathen worship, becomes distracted, and cannot possibly be the tribute of a nature entirely at one with itself. The polytheist, like the polygamist, has to parcel out his affection to competing favourites, and then dismiss them with their gifts to various points of the compass. It must necessarily be so in dealing with attachments to the finite, for the finite is many. He who does not love God with all his heart is an idolater without the idolater's palliating ignorance. If we can love the infinite at all, we can love absolutely, because He is alone in the category to which He belongs. The first and great commandment in some respects is simpler than the second, because in the home, in the community, and in the world, we have to deal delicately with compet-

ing obligations, and strike a just balance between them. But no fine distribution is required here. It is one God who asks for all. The heathen worshipper is in the position of a host at a party of many guests, who has to so weigh out and apportion his attentions that no one will go away feeling that he has been slighted, and the task is sometimes as difficult as the government of a kingdom. The scrupulous Pagan is so nervous lest there should have been an omission from his list of honours that he puts up his altar to "the unknown god." But when Almighty God seeks from us the honour and love which are His due, there are no complex and ramifying claims to be adjusted. Heart and mind and strength must be in such indissoluble accord that they will correspond in some imperfect degree to the sublime unity of God.

The current secularisms of the day assert that the churches, at the bidding of Jesus Christ, attempt the difficult task of regulating human conduct from the wrong side. Ethical societies are formed, whose work in enforcing civic duties no right-minded man should disparage, which aim at keeping social obligations and supernatural religion apart from each other, and, indeed, reversing the old order of precedence. Social morality, we are assured, is not concerned with the being of a God; and the man of pure instincts and irreproachable life often doubts every article of the Christian creed, whilst the fanatical pietist sometimes seems deficient in the elementary sense of right and wrong. Unhappy exceptions are

quoted to enforce the argument. Transpose the commandments, on which hang all the law and the prophets. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," must stand first, and, if any one wishes to add "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," if God indeed can be known and loved, well let him reserve his second precept for those who are like-minded with himself, and keep it well in the background. The moralists of the Far East have taken up this position, although they go beyond our own ethical societies, and put a Divine mandate into their precepts. The love of a child to parents is the first moral sentiment to arise within the opening mind; out of the first love grows a second love which expresses itself towards those who are gathered in the same home; and these family instincts flower at last into friendship, patriotism, and an all-embracing humanity. That, of course, looks like the natural order, but the question arises whether behind it there is not a spiritual order which gives it strength and validity. It would be a mistake to imitate the methods of the ethical teachers who try to tear away the second commandment from the first, and make it stand upon its feet alone, by treating the first commandment as though it were independent of the second. Never drive a wedge between the two, for they are most effectually fulfilled together, and not apart. St John seems to imply that it is easier to love the visible brother whom we have seen, than to love the God whom we have not seen.

Either failure, however, implies a defect of love in the character. If there is a sufficient moral motive-power in the man's heart to carry his love up to the heights of heaven, there will be a sufficient motive force to carry it to those with whom he stands in daily relationship. The two sets of duties help each other, and failure in the one will bring failure in the other. Priority in our power of realising and interpreting the relationship in which an obligation inheres, does not necessarily give that obligation its most pre-eminent and commanding place.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT IS NECESSARY TO GIVE SANCTION AND INDISPUTABLE VALIDITY TO THE SECOND. Even the law-givers and philosophers of the East, who put the codes of family and civic duty before the worship of supernatural beings, looked upon all the moral instincts which expressed themselves in human nature as a direct mandate from the skies. In their judgment, virtue had no binding force apart from this. May we not venture to say the touch of God is put upon the nature of a child, before the child has that consciousness of a gracious parental care, which awakens his gratitude and enlists his obedience. Congenital callousness and criminality would be the rule, but for the earlier imprint of tenderness from Him who is the Father of our spirits. When the male and female flowers are produced upon different trees of the same species, and the fertilising pollen must be conveyed by the wind, the petals open some time

before the leaves unfold, so as to give free course to the winds and their freight of pollen dust. And the vitalising breath of God moves upon the opening spirit of a child before the human instincts of love, gratitude, and submission have begun to develop. God's inscrutable act within the nature prepares it to recognise and appreciate the second code of virtues, and in the heart of the babe there may be a vague sense of God, for which no expression can be found, that precedes all consciousness of the human affections which are ministering in the home. The priority of obligation cannot be settled by a study of the experiences of adult life. It is said that sometimes the high-souled moralist has no sense of supernatural religion; but in nine cases out of ten the formative stage in his moral development was passed before religious faith was entirely lost. As a matter of fact, in many cases, the loss of faith leads to contempt of all theories of moral obligation, even when correct habits of life are maintained. We might perhaps dispense with the first commandment and devote our entire strength to the second, if we could only feel we were faultless and finished automatons, guaranteed to perform a certain set of social virtues without breakdown. But we lack the feeling that we are automatons, and need reasons for the acts upon which we enter. Apart from the sanctions of man-made law, which does not alway command our reverence, and the mysterious satisfactions inherent in doing right, we know no reason

why we should choose to fulfil the second commandment if we abolish the first. The satisfactions conveying themselves into us from the unseen, perhaps admit of being decoded into an intelligible theology. An invisible hand is seeking to stamp the great law of love upon human life.

LOVE TO GOD STANDS FIRST IN THE ORDER OF DUTIES, BECAUSE THIS REGULATING PRINCIPLE IS NECESSARY TO SAVE THE LOVE WE CHERISH TOWARDS OUR FELLOWS FROM THE FLAWS AND LIMITATIONS WHICH SO OFTEN VITIATE IT. The love which is naturalistic in its basis, and refuses to concern itself with the spiritual and the infinite, is in danger of moving through only a petty circle and reverting to a new form of selfishness. If love begins and ends with those who are of our own immediate kindred, it crystallises into clannishness, which is arrested altruism, and works woeful mischief upon the larger scale of life. If the sentiment concentrates itself upon the class to which we belong, or desire to enter, it becomes caste, and caste tends to the disparagement of large groups of our neighbours, and kindles that heart-burning which is a fatal hindrance to human brotherhood. If all affection expends itself upon the religious denomination to which we adhere, it becomes bigotry and schism, making catholic ideals impossible. If the horizon of one country or of one empire shuts in our love, it becomes a spurious patriotism, which thinks the highest service we can render to our country is to

hate, revile, depreciate, and oppress other countries. Love needs to breathe the larger and more Divine atmosphere, to which it is pointed from its birth-dawn in the first commandment. The principle can only be all that it might be, and all that to which it is capable of rising, when it centres itself upon the infinite and the universal, the God and Father of all mankind. When we learn to love God we acquire the power of loving others, because He loves them, and find perhaps faint traits of kinship with Himself in the most unpromising and repulsive people. The second duty is helped to its noblest ranges of application by the first.

IF WE VENTURE TO REVERSE THESE TWO COMMANDMENTS, WE SHALL PERHAPS COME TO FIND THAT WE ARE PUTTING THE MORE DIFFICULT TASK FIRST, AND ROBBING OURSELVES OF AN ETHICAL VANTAGE-GROUND. The neighbour to whom our love is due may be more comprehensible to our understanding than the God above us, "whom no man hath seen nor can see," but is He therefore more lovable? To make the love of God a primary duty, saves us from the painful necessity of trying to love imperfection before we are quite capable of it. In the cool, critical moods to which we are sometimes subject, we can find in our chief heroes human foibles, and all our neighbours are not heroes. Little sun-spots sometimes show in the characters of those whose memories are most sacred to us. It happens now and again that men and women

cannot give absolute and unqualified allegiance and affection to those with whom they are associated in intimate family relationship. In saying this there is no wish to excuse the failure on either side, but to state the problem. If to love our neighbour were mere child's play, we should have to search for weeks before we could discover a cynic, a malcontent, or a rebel. The duty of keeping the fifth commandment must be surrounded with the thorniest difficulties for the children who wail with hunger and privation at home, whilst their parents are spending the family earnings in drink shops. If a child has received the taint of disease from profligate forefathers, when he comes to know the facts he will not find it easy to fulfil the second table of the law. Must affection be shown to a brother who has brought a whole household into poverty and disrepute? It must. But it is a much easier thing to love God. A lad of eight, who had been half beaten to death by a brutal father, was waiting at the prison gates to welcome back the father when he had finished his term of hard labour. There must have been a great deal of God in that little martyr, but if he had lived twenty years longer in the world he might have had a more retentive memory. Must Jabez Balfour's bankrupt victims love their neighbour as they love themselves? They must try; but it is a far easier thing to love God. To love the worst is a duty, but we make ourselves strong to love the worst by first of all loving the

highest and the best. There are mothers who want their children to grow up in enthusiasm for art, music, lofty literature, and they do not begin by pointing them to pictorial advertisements on the hoardings, or inviting a man with an accordion to the children's parties, or keeping the nursery table well supplied with Scraps and Jack Sheppards. They wish them to begin with the best, and that is wisdom.

We are strengthened into the love which is the vital force in all social moralities, by first setting ourselves to love God with all the heart and mind and strength. One of the Eastern moralists, to whom reference has already been made, asks the question, "How can men hope to succeed in their service of an unseen world if they have so much failure and shortcoming in sustaining the relationships of common life?" The best course is to limit the field of obligation, and concentrate thought and strength upon plain, simple, every-day duties. But another view may be taken of the position which arises through failure in the things which lie nearest to us. We shall, perhaps, be more likely to succeed in both by beginning with the invisible. A nature which finds it hard to love may find it best to let the little love hiding in the secret recesses of the soul go out towards the greatest benefactor of whom it knows, and the scanty streams will receive accessions by the process. The love of our hearts, when we are willing to lavish it, is won by deeds, and does not depend upon our power of analysing mysteries in

the personality of the benefactor. We are told to love incompatible members of the families and kindreds with which we are associated, and perhaps they are occasions of irritation to us, thorns stabbing our most densely massed and delicate nerve-processes. We are told to love neighbours who are silly, selfish, bad-tempered, void of fine scruples, vicious. It is like telling us to scale a citadel on whose smooth, steep walls there is not a crumb of foothold. But if we first love God with all our hearts, we shall find the earlier commandment become a scaling ladder by which we may attempt the dizzy heights of the second. Through the strength received by loving the infinitely perfect, we shall do what for the moment seems quite impossible. There is nothing to chill or turn back the love we give to Him who is an infinitely worthy object of it. He is ever true, upright, merciful, perfect. If I can attain the habit of loving God, I find a starting-point for all other loves which are binding upon me; and I shall love and help the least attractive, because He loves them and seeks their salvation. Do you not think that Jesus was able to love with such intense and holy affection the least lovely of those amidst whom He dwelt, because He had been fulfilling a first commandment from everlasting, and exercising His nature in the love of the all-perfect Father? And now He was able to love the most repulsive souls about Him, and to pray for the ruffians who did Him to death, since through untold ages all the powers of

His mind had been bathing in the Divine fulness, and were unchangeably benign. To dwell by love in the bosom of the Father, and become familiar with the mysteries of the Divine goodness, is to acquire the power of responding to every claim and call of humanity.

LOVE IS WON BY THOSE SPECIAL KINDNESSES WHICH ENTER LIKE SUNSHINE INTO LIFE, MAKING IT A GLADNESS TO US, AND BY THE MOTIVES OF WHICH THEY SPEAK, RATHER THAN BY A MASTERY OF THE METAPHYSICS OF PERSONALITY, EITHER HUMAN OR DIVINE. If God is indeed shrouded in mystery, and His invisibility at first seems to baffle us, He is revealed in part by the history of His dealings with us. The grace given to us exceeds our chastisements, and our chastisements are few in comparison with our ill-deserts; and a patient providence all our days has been teaching us lessons of gratitude in an alphabet of large letters. It needs no profound or complex analysis to trace back the gifts of life to His primal bounty. Those who have most helped and befriended us, are His stewards administering the munificence of an invisible treasury. Sun would not shine, fruits ripen, friends meet friends with winsome good-will, parents cherish their little ones with tenderness and fidelity, home glow with serene and sacred charm, apart from His decree. In all the gifts coming from human hands to bless us, we are reminded of an unbegotten Benefactor who stands in the darkness of the back-

ground, and who is the eternal spring of benediction. It is true His ways may sometimes baffle us, no less than the inconceivable secret of His being. But if we are tempted to rebel, it is because we have not yet learned to scan the immensity of His counsels; and we know that after all His matchless good-will is wedded to infinite wisdom, and shall one day more than justify itself to our growing thought. Our love is not checked, as love towards our neighbour is sometimes checked, by the thought that the thorn which comes into our flesh has been planted there by selfishness or culpable unwisdom. No such suspicion can arrest the outgoings of our love towards God. Is it easier for us to learn the principle through which all law is fulfilled, by thinking of the Benefactor who is absolutely good and unerringly wise? or by thinking of earthly friends and helpers who, at the best, are compounds of good and evil, sagacity and foolishness? The apostle thought all love began with God. "We love because He first loved us," and the love thus quickened goes just as far as finite thought will carry it; and whilst centred in heaven, never stumbles when face to face with the unlovely brother on earth, or the neighbour who deserves nothing at our hands.

THE INSCRUTABILITY OF GOD, WHICH IS OFTEN PLEADED AS AN ARGUMENT AGAINST MAKING THIS THE FIRST COMMANDMENT, OUGHT RATHER TO HELP THAN HINDER OUR LOVE. The mystery which enters into love is one of the deepest secrets

of its vitality. In the love which endures, a large measure of reverence must be present, and reverence is always endangered by the discovery of superficiality and limitation. God's condescension to our infirmity and low estate, must be estimated by His incomprehensible greatness and majesty, and vast, gracious, unaffected condescension always enlists gratitude and awe. Strict, all-round equality of gift and position in two companions, if not fatal to love, at least circumscribes its larger growth. All attachments must be sustained by contrasts, which stop short of incompatibility. It sounds like a paradox, but it is nevertheless true, that where any high degree of love binds two human beings together each is superior to the other. In some domain of thought or character each will find in the other a nobler and a more striking quality than he finds in himself. When we can read moderately good people inside and out, the bloom is thumbed away, the tribute of honour we gave them is a little reduced, and our love loses in ardour. We have a feeling in meeting with some narrow, stolid persons for the second or the third time, that we have come up against a blank wall, and that they offer a poor field of romance for the explorer. No new veins of interest crop up in their conversation. We have discovered how much they know, what measure of originality they possess, all that of which they are capable in action. We have bottomed them, weighed them in the balance, measured them upwards, downwards,

sideways. They offer as little scope for speculation as the pendulum in an old clock-case. We know what under certain circumstances they will think, how a particular set of events will act upon their feelings, the trend their conduct will take when the call comes. No freshness, romance, or unexpected discovery, is possible. Really affable people who live much together grow tired of each other's company, because they are such unfortunate duplicates. They have no inventiveness, no growing knowledge, and do not trouble to be their best in each other's presence. The equality is too complete. It is easy to love one who is above us, and easy to love one below us, who may be dependent upon our kindness and strength; but the most difficult task of all is to love one who is on precisely the same plane. Our hearts call for that higher form of romance which is a vague groping after infinite and endless variety. Half the charm of a child is in his unexpected turns of thought and feeling. We can best begin our training in the school of love by setting our hearts upon Him who is supremely great and inscrutable. We shall find the love which wins our love is as unfathomable and as exhaustless as all other powers of the Godhead. A graded pathway has been prepared for us, and if we have hitherto failed, let us try the problem according to the Master's method, and love the highest first.

In this chief commandment is there not a dim antici-

pation of the gospel Jesus came to announce and exemplify? The spirit of the law is a key to the interpretation of the Divine character. Is the mighty being who dwells in the thick darkness One who can respond to love? for love refined from all grossness, is rarely if ever asked where there is neither capacity nor desire to return it. The great Jehovah must love men if He asks to be loved with supreme devotion. In the early ages, of course, reverence rather than sentiment was predominant in the idea of love, but then as now and always, love expressed a great principle of benignity. The prophets were alive to the tenderness of the word when they made the marriage covenant set forth God's relation to His chosen people. Religion, even under the Old Dispensation, did not consist, like the bulk of all heathen religion, in fear. This foundation commandment makes ready for the sublime doctrine of the Divine Fatherhood. God is love, and if it were otherwise He would not humble Himself to ask our love. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." It is sometimes said that the Jew had no conception of the future life, but whatever explanation we may give of the reticence of some portions of the Old Testament Scriptures upon the subject, it is obvious that the devout and reflective Jew, who set himself to keep this commandment, must have had an instinctive sense of the love of the Divine nature, and this would disarm his fears and yield much inarticulate consolation. In being

gathered to his fathers, he would be gathered into a domain ruled by a great Being who had sought love for Himself as well as for earthly kindred and neighbours. And the thought is not without its uses for us in some of our modern moods of misgiving. What lies beyond the veil whose fringes we have now and again all but touched? When the consciousness has been benumbed into its last sleep, and all the scenes and relationships of earth have been wiped out from the apprehension, what new facts will confront it at the strange awaking on the other side? Love makes the home, and the love that has always been asking our undivided love will spread forth new pavilions of holy affection in the darknesses of illimitable space. "Do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord," and He who challenges successive generations with these words is Love, and He never ceases to desire and demand our love.

IX.

THE CULMINATION OF GUILT.

"Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight."—PSALM li. 4.

THE Bible runs no risk of underestimating the wrong a man's sin does to his fellow-man. With its strict precepts of restitution, its careful scale of civil penalties, its prescriptions minute to the point of tediousness, the respect it asks for weak, makeshift representatives of official justice, this, at least, cannot be urged against it. It never tries to minimise the social mischief which ensues from sin, or sets down grievances as sentimental only. Unless the worshipper first settles up accounts with those who have cause of complaint against him, it is useless coming to God's altar. But the social adjustment does not finally bury a trespass, and the man's steps must be turned again to the altar where the gift has been left, since God is the One who has been most wronged by a misdeed. The harm done to a fellow-sinner is a little thing in comparison with the affront offered to God Himself. Let us beware of taking our tone from a near-sighted world, which, prone to

consider itself first, says, with a strange inversion of the Psalmist's confession, "Against thee," friend, kinsman, neighbour, "against thee only have I sinned."

The peculiar accent put upon sin by this inspired penitent denotes a man who had hitherto possessed a keen, life-long sense of God. If we are repelled by what we may choose to call a tone of exaggeration in this self-abasing phraseology, it is obvious we are dominated by the apathy of an ignorant, primitive heathenism, possibly even by a temper of rank atheism. The foul, insidious leaven of an old-world superstition often secretes itself within our hearts, when the rude, obsolete images of our forefathers have gone into museums. The tendency to shift the centres of obligation from the heavenly into earthly spheres, to hustle the Divine throne into a land of oblivion, and put the expediencies of modern life high upon the horizon, is a note of that unspiritual temper from which the grosser Gentile idolatries took their rise. There can be no surer mark of this bias than to say the wrong of sin begins and ends with the person against whom it is committed. Man's rights are of transcendent importance, but for the obvious reason that God is above, around, and within man; and if you eliminate God, you take all life and strength out of obligation, and make it powerless to bind.

Men may be roughly classified into three groups; those who have little or no sense of sin, those who

think of it chiefly as an inconvenience caused to their friends and neighbours, and those who have been compelled to recognise that it is a paramount offence against God. It is not easy to say whether the first or the second class is the more numerous, for the frontier between them wavers. Those who belong to the third class often find themselves in a minority, but they, at least, stand upon the threshold of a new life. The writer of the Psalm before us is their type and their spokesman.

A picture of the pain brought upon friend or kinsman by ill-considered word and selfish act, sometimes haunts the memory more obstinately than the long-life grief done by a false attitude of mind to the Spirit of God. It may happen even that conscience money is sent by a defaulting citizen to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and yet no uneasiness is felt, because there has been habitual failure to render to God the things which are God's. A high-minded man like Thomas Carlyle moans aloud in the last years of his life over the peevishness and irritation shown to a sensitive member of his family, and such regret may have been only fitting; but all the time he may be superbly insensible to the affront offered to one no less sensitive and gentle, the unseen presence of the great Friend of humanity, which always hovers within the home, if, at least, Christianity be true. So gross and matter-of-fact in our perceptions are we become, that we writhe with compunction when

we see that our sins have brought disquietude and suffering into some little nook of the world, and are quite callous to the fact that they have cast tragic shadows into the realm of the unseen.

This vague, unspiritual idea, so rife at the present hour, some of our thinkers try to formulate into a system and to justify by argument. The encouragement of the schools is lavished upon those who discover the birth of all moral sanctions in the chemistry of the cell, and who ignore every ingredient in wrong-doing but its social result. For such minds no morality is worth a moment's consideration which does not begin and end in utilitarian tests. Yet sin is no more measurable by the senses than the range of gravitation can be told by the few inches of string in a schoolboy's pocket. As well hope to span the path of the great meteor systems which swing round the sun on the finder of a toy Kodak, as to define sin by its effect upon the section of society under our immediate observation. It projects its shadow into other worlds than ours.

Human rights derive their sacredness from the character and authority of God Himself, and the violation of those rights affronts the great Being from whom they acquire their force. The sanctions attaching to the duties of our earthly relationships are weakened notes, pale transcripts, dim reflections of the absolute truth and righteousness. If we leave God out of the account, the man next door is a specimen of the plastic art fitted up with a

bit of vital mechanism, and his rights awaken no sure response within my conscience. He may have interests, but God's decree alone can convert his interests into rights. The unbelieving world, of course, repudiates those supernatural sanctions which make common duties binding upon us. A leader of the Positivists has said, "The trust in humanity is the motive and saving power of modern civilisation, and that even where it is encumbered by a conscious belief in God and Christ, in gospel and salvation." We cannot idealise humanity without the help of some unseen lawgiver who is behind the processes of its growth, and who puts a stamp of sacredness upon its demands. Far from God being an encumbrance to our faith in humanity, such faith is impossible unless God be its sponsor, and His indwelling presence of holiness blend with the claim made upon our reverence and trust. An ethical ideal which does not root itself in the character and authority of God, reminds one of the plants which derive their nutriment from the air, and contribute neither strength nor beauty to the structure of our civilisation.

How do rights arise? The tendency of a hasty and superficial age is to think of the standards to which human conduct is required to conform, as invented and established by governments, families, tribes, combinations and confederacies of tribes. As well might we profess that the Marconi stations create the electricity with which the universe

throbs. Rights precede all individual and collective sovereignties, and the work of legislatures would be impossible unless they had pre-existing rights to define and formulate. It is inconceivable that a few hundred landowners, merchants, stockbrokers, and lawyers, sitting in presence of a Speaker and a gold mace, should manufacture the sanctions of conduct, or change by a single hair's breadth in the course of a millennium, our judgment of the difference between right and wrong; and it is equally inconceivable that their rude predecessors should have done it. It is not because of their work that actions begin to classify themselves into vices and virtues, crimes and charities.

Nor did human rights, and the response of the moral sense to their authority, arise in the rude struggles of primitive man when he was a dweller in caves and forests. This is not the place for an argument against the genesis of the conscience from electric atoms. The ideals of character with which we are equipped hold sanctions more august than can have been produced by any number of chemical reactions, or generated by the stress and strain of unknown centuries. Professor Huxley has well said: "The notion that the doctrine of evolution can furnish a foundation for morals seems to me to be an illusion which has arisen from the unfortunate ambiguity of the term 'fittest.' The fittest who survives in the struggle for existence, may be, and often is, the ethically worst." Is my fear of doing

unjustly, forsooth, a half-forgotten nightmare of the grinning teeth and brandished spear, with which one of my ancestors was menaced, when he tried to take too large a mouthful of the spoils of the tribal hunt? Has the reluctance felt by a man of honour at the idea of appropriating a neighbour's property no other substratum than the terrors of a prehistoric Donnybrook fair, where naked savages taught each other with tomahawks the distinction between thine and mine? The theory is surely answered by the fact that a man may be void of all fear, and yet retain a painful dread of every kind of wrong-doing. Indeed, men often increase in bravery as the conscience grows in delicacy, showing that the two things have no organic relation to each other; and probably never had. How can the sense of right be inherited from ancestors who were not especially noted for it themselves? How can the mystic glory which encircles all moral ideas come by a process of innate derivation from natures gross, worldly, brutalised, perhaps cannibal? The directors of a tottering bank might as well state in their annual report that they had been helped to tide over the financial crisis of the year by the dossers in a Salvation Army shelter. Moral ideas have not picked up the sacredness clinging to them in the processes of a long, precarious evolution. There is that within me which is better than my best antecedents, better than my best courses of conduct. The great King and Lawgiver comes into the centre of my being, and the

emphasis I put upon right and wrong arises from His silent, solemn inspiration within me. Assuming that an incalculably long heredity has influenced my moral endowments and capacities, this does not divest them of their Divine authority, any more than the ancient inscription on an aqueduct proves that the water flowing through it to-day is stale, and has not issued fresh from the springs in the far-off hills.

If this be so, the wrong done to a fellow-mortal in an act of sin is subordinate to the portentous wrong done to God Himself. All human claims reflect the character and authority of an indwelling God. He is behind our visible humanity, and feels whatsoever man can feel for another; and unutterably more. Divine love is deeper than the love a man feels for himself and his own, and whosoever touches another to injure or defraud, touches the apple of God's eye.

The Psalmist's confession will be felt to represent no exaggerated truth, if we remember that God's claim upon the obedience of His servants is more strongly based than any human claim. The relation in which He has placed Himself to us is of incomparable tenderness, and puts us under the constraint of a peculiar obligation. Every friend and helper who appears in our pathway to enlist our love by service, is the type of a great spiritual Benefactor whose ministries put us under a yet deeper debt of gratitude. The fellowship of human sympathy suggests a more perfect sympathy which yearns over us, stretching out unseen hands of succour, and surpassing our

richest experiences of human fidelity and devotion. Every bond that unites men to each other, unites yet more strongly to God, and subjects the soul to a more sacred law.

The writer of this psalm, if we may still interpret it in the light of its traditional authorship, could not have been unmindful of his tremendous obligation to the man he had irreparably wronged. Uriah the Hittite was the descendant of a despised and vanquished race, and might have felt free to play the part of a conspirator and obstructionist to the end of his days. But all traces of the ancient hatred had passed away from his soul, and David had no more chivalrous and devoted leader in his armies. Humanly speaking, such men had given to David his throne and kingdom. Punctuality, despatch, unswerving fidelity, bravery that never blenched, these were the features which stood boldly out in his manner of life. Such was his zeal for the State and its interests, that he would not cross the threshold of a home brightened by uncommon grace and charm, whilst his comrades were under canvas in the field. His was no warfare varied with pianos and champagne. This doughty alien, though he has much to lose, is as ready to serve David at the price of his own blood as the men who carved their way to the well at Bethlehem. He will undertake any duty from love to a king who proves himself at length flagrantly unworthy of it. Such a man had a unique claim upon the gratitude and good offices of his

master, and David doubtless felt this when he penned his penitential prayer.

But the most impressive human claims are after all but types and shadows of the absorbing claim of Almighty God. God had been more to David than his faithful and valiant captains and counsellors, for it was His help which made them champions and heroes, rather than broken reeds. When the followers of the shepherd-patriot were but few and faint-hearted, legions of light from on high had been his body-guard. In many a hymn of praise David avows that Jehovah had been shield and buckler to him in face of a thousand odds, a stronger defence than rocks, citadels, and armies in battle array. Whilst still a hunted exile, an unsleeping love had watched from above the stars over his perilous wilderness slumbers. His throne and its wise ministers, the hearts of a chivalrous and devoted people, heroes who shrank from nothing in the service of their liege lord, were the gifts of God and the product of His inspirations. More generous and untiring than the love of this Hittite soldier, and rising to purer heights of sacrifice was the Divine love which had poured itself out upon this son of a village farmer. Whatever fidelity, heroism, sacrifice, friendship, this erring king had received in the course of his life, God Himself was the strength and substance of it. He had been the inspiring spirit of every beneficent relationship into which the Psalmist had been led; and the sin against God, in the sensual

transgression he bewails, exceeded in grievousness even the sin against man. The sin against Uriah and the people at large was black ; but the sin against God was blacker still.

The Psalmist's confession may be looked upon in the light of another fact ; man's relationship to God is more vital, intimate, and abiding than his closest earthly ties. He is knit together with Him into a more essential solidarity ; and if this is so, sin against God involves a more disastrous breach of fellowship. Those grouped with us into a common life feel the incidence of our errors, in proportion to the nearness of the bonds that identify their interest and honour with our own. A felony committed in an English village may seem to hurt no one in the Australian bush or on the Steppes of Siberia, but it will darken the home of which the felon has been centre and keystone, and distress many in the community where the home stands. A misguided act vexes the friends and kindred of the evil-doer, and vexes them in degrees determined by the confidence they have given him and their family partnership in his character and reputation. A second or a third cousin may not feel acutely the obliquity into which I fall, unless he is victimised by it, whilst a casual acquaintance may discuss it with detachment and unconcern ; but against those who are of my own flesh and blood I sin thereby as grievously as against myself. Next after the family of Uriah, broken up and bitterly dishonoured by this freak of unheeding

passion, David's own house was wronged. What a mercy Jesse could not be disquieted in his long sleep by the bruiting abroad of this scandal! Every member of the king's circle felt as though he had been discredited. People would turn with sickness and loathing from the beautiful hymns they had learned from the shepherd-harpist. The king's transgression of the sixth and seventh commandments would make it hard, if not impossible, for his children to obey the fifth. Their faith in truth, honour, simplicity, religion itself would be rudely shaken, perhaps for a lifetime. They had to bear to the end a name which had been dragged in the mire. By the constraint of their own best instincts, as well as by the requirement of an immemorial law, they were asked to love one who had exposed them to the sharpest scorn. Compacts with surrounding kings, attachments to advisers and servants, might be ended, but other ties could only be dissolved by death; and those of David's blood must needs be bound up with his guilt for the rest of their days. The old tribute of love and honour David had once received in his home must have been stinted into formality, if paid at all. There are men who live loosely whilst amongst strangers, and then go back to their old places in the community without apparent loss of honour. But this sin was at home, and brought its frightful penalty upon every one included in its circle.

Deep as was David's guilt in view of these relationships, it was greater before God. If God is indeed

the soul of love, the spring of fatherhood, the essence and spiritual substratum of all benign kinships, He must have been more aggrieved by this transgression than any earthly victim of it. Breathing into man at the beginning the mystery of His own nature, ordaining this youth from a humble home to be the type of His own sinless Son, visiting the spirit of David with great inspirations, caring for this king taken from the sheepfolds with a providence of untiring tenderness, entering into a fellowship with His servant, sweeter and more sacred than the refining intimacies of family life, who could be so deeply grieved by this act, who so cruelly wronged, as Jehovah Himself? The relation between man and man, as far as it concerns the present life, is limited, and at its longest is but brief. After some rough fashion, in the dissolutions of the grave, dishonour is at last wiped away. The social offences of the pilgrim life seem to obliterate themselves after a time, like the prints and litter of the caravan when the tents have been taken down and it has passed into new horizons. But this lapse involved rupture in an immortal relationship, a shock to the indestructible sensibilities acting between the Creator and the creature. Those in family contact with the unworthy king would be haunted by intermittent memories of his transgression, whilst God must see it always. If the power to love is inseparable from the liability to feel the treachery which obtrudes itself in place of love, the

Divine heart must have been wounded by this glaring act of backsliding. David had lowered the ideal of kinship and fatherhood, abasing those who came before and those who followed after in his lineage; but a higher, purer, holier name, the unutterable name itself, had been turned into the jest of the blasphemer. The great God is more jealous for His honour than the man of sturdy uprightness for his own fair fame; since through the hallowing of His name men are saved. God suffers in work, in purpose, in the accomplishment of His counsels amongst men, in His deep love for humanity, when His faithless servants turn His glory into reproach and prejudice, and impede His work in the world. In a paramount degree sin is against God. Whether we call ourselves His servants or not, we are, at least, made in a similitude we cannot disguise or cast off, and every transgression affronts the spirit which is the enduring essence of all right relationship, and dishonours an unspeakably sacred name. In the process of reckoning with ourselves and seeking to reach a right moral judgment of the past, let us not forget to put this phase of sin first.

The Godward guilt of sin is incomparably grave, because it stirs up within His holy nature a repugnance, the intensity of which we cannot express or conceive. To His spirit of unspotted light an act of darkness and shame is a more deadly offence than to those who stand lower in the moral scale. He is brought into antagonism with it, not only as an official

administrator, but by all the affections of His personal life. Our sense of the incompatibility of the various forms of trangression with the highest good is vague and unreasoning, as the recoil of the sensitive plant from a foreign body which touches it. The plant cannot know the form, colour, weight, and properties of that from which it shrinks, whilst we, with our elaborated senses, can predicate a score things that are beyond the range of its apprehension. From the injury sin inflicts upon ourselves and others we instinctively shrink, but the recoil is often as undiscerning as the function of that curious bit of vegetable mechanism. God sees and feels the terrible inwardness of all transgression, and the ever-present sensibilities of His immeasurable life are arrayed against it. If a home for the blind were built in a district where grass does not grow nor flowers bloom, they would scarcely be aggrieved by the privation. Some people are destitute of the sense of smell, and would not think themselves martyrs if housed on the windward side of a refuse destructor or a sewage farm; but those who can perceive the millionth part of a grain of putrid matter would think otherwise. Our sense of sin is imperfectly developed, for we feel it chiefly as an evil fate which plays havoc with our temporal interests, and not as a shameful spiritual uncleanness. These illustrations, which might be multiplied, only hint in a slight degree the disparity between our blunt, half-blind sensibilities, and the delicate, intense

discernments of the Divine nature. We are amazed to the verge of incredulity that God should have given His Son to save men from the power of sin by a cruel cross and a mysterious passion; but we should be amazed no longer if we realised the offensiveness of sin after His pattern. We wonder that He should banish from His presence, perhaps for ever, those made in His image whom He would fain keep for ever near His heart; but we should wonder no longer if we could see sin through His pure and holy eyes. We cannot understand His abhorrence of that which to us seems a temporary and slightly unpleasant accident; but our judgment would swiftly change if we could love as He loves. Sin compels God to the bitterest and most unwelcome acts of His providential government. Those brutally victimised by sin, and whose blood cries piteously to God, cannot hate it as He hates it. He loathes it with more than the collective abhorrences of all who have groaned, and wept, and perished broken-hearted under the stress of its outrage. Because God's nature is pre-eminently holy, sin in whatever form is pre-eminently sin against God.

That God's judgment is more overwhelming than the most tragic penalty man can affix to wrong-doing is a witness to His view of the gravity of sin. God is the kinsman and the vindicator of every aggrieved weakling upon earth. Some commentators have said that David's confession is overstrained, and that all he meant by these words was that he stood

above the judges who received their appointments at his hand, and human courts could not pronounce sentence against him; he must, therefore, give himself up into God's hands, to be dealt with by a higher tribunal. Such an explanation is inadequate, and scarcely expresses what was in the Psalmist's mind. And it is not quite true. Many are the ways by which kings and princes may be punished at the hands of their subjects, even when there is no Judge Gascoigne to put the law in force against those in high places. Royal persons are human enough to be sensitive to public opinion, and may be made to wince when public esteem is withdrawn. David's own courtiers could punish him, if no one, indeed, ventured to cast the first stone. The chilling deferences of his friends and counsellors, the less scrupulous honour accorded to him by the ministers of his throne, the loud laugh heard from menials who looked upon their master's fall as a broadening out of licence for themselves, the glances in which scorn was only half-concealed, such things would show David that he had been judged and implicitly sentenced, no less severely than the commonest offender in the land. But the backsliding king felt that these silent and informal retributions were nothing in comparison with the penalties of an avenging Providence. Nathan might limit himself to a painful reproof, Bathsheba might forget her wrong and shame in the pride of her new position, and Uriah himself might have no Hittite kinsman

to champion the wronged and the foully slain. But God was a more dreadful avenger, and would not forget the responsibilities of the kinsman. The ear that listened to the cry of Abel's blood had not grown heavy to that of Uriah's. An Almighty hand holds within it the claim and plaint of every wronged man, woman, and child. And just as soon as God withdrew His protecting presence, outward signs of retribution appeared thick and fast—incest, fratricide, anarchy—till, at last, the beauty of the palace was gone, and it stood in the sun ghastly as a smirched mad-house. In His judgments God makes men realise that it is chiefly He who has been sinned against in every crime against honour, virtue, and human life. When the tenderest spirit in the universe has to penalise and stamp transgression with infamy, by sentences of appalling severity, we may learn how abhorrent it is in His sight.

Behind the temporal distresses which destroyed the outward peace of the Psalmist's life, there was a mysterious wrath of which the calamities of the home and the State were but passing signs. He had to meet the reproach of the gentle Jehovah he had once hymned as his faithful Shepherd, and the scorn of the whole kingdom was less insufferable than this. A palace splashed with blood-stains that would not wash out, a fair home changed into a nest of lascivious outrage, a settled country rent with rebellion and fatal strife, a cherished but treacherous son transfixed by a dart in the

forest of Ephraim, such horrors were scarcely so dark as the cloud veiling the mysterious face he had once desired to see with strong, insatiable longing. In all human judgments there are things we can dispute, elements of misconception on which we can fasten for our relief, a lack of fine equitable balance which becomes the raw material of our makeshift consolations. But in the judgment of Divine love there is nothing to be challenged, not the least oversight on which a man can fasten and think himself something midway between a martyr and a malefactor. The verdict upon which it rests is inevitable, and the sentence which follows is stamped with hopeless, indisputable finality. The calm, magnanimous God gives such expression to His wrath against sin, that it becomes more dreadful than the wildest forms of human displeasure. The most extreme penalties men devise, formal and informal alike, are trifling in comparison with that which God makes to rest upon sin. Into the consciousness of the universe God puts a witness who declares that He is singular in His sense of the awfulness of sin. The social havoc wrought by it is small side by side with the disastrous issues to which it leads in the spiritual realm. It is there it brings forth its most terrible fruit, and it is there it must be grappled with and destroyed. "Against Thee, and Thee only, have I sinned."

The man who represents the temper of the latest science sometimes pleads that a penitence with this

peculiar emphasis in it, is no longer possible. A long chain of cosmic processes stretches between us and the unknown God, and we find it difficult to realise that He is a living Law-giver and a vigilant Judge. The precepts which regulate conduct seem to be a product of protracted and complex social reactions which began in prehistoric ages. The tradition of Sinai and its laws is dim, and the history in which it is embedded is more or less debatable. This, at least, is the current assumption of the hour, and it tends to modify our view of moral obligation, and to attenuate our sense of sin. But is the inference just? Is there not a Mount Sinai within every man, from which the Divine law is promulgated anew, and do we not hear in our silent hours voices no less solemn than that of the trumpet, waxing louder and louder, to which the trembling Israelite listened? If this is so, the law binding itself upon us grows in sacredness and reality with the flight of centuries, and transgression loses no single shade of its culpability, and is pre-eminently an affront to the ever-present God. Admitting that our ideas of right have been to some extent squared and polished by the forces of a historic evolution, this does not in any degree diminish their sanctions or rob them of their Divine authority. The sovereign may speak to his minister through a cable that stretches for a thousand leagues across a sea-floor, and the message may be put upon the wires anew half-a-dozen times, and carried along its last stage

upon horseback; but the word is just as royal and just as binding as if the king were speaking to his minister face to face. The guilt of disobedience does not disappear because of the diverse countries through which the word is conveyed, or the control exercised by foreign powers over different sections of the telegraphic system. A crime may be perpetrated on one continent by a man in another continent, and the guilt of the crime is the same, although he is not present bodily at its commission. And through those subtle agencies which bind seen and unseen worlds into one, our trespasses here on earth may reach up to the throne of God in heaven. All sin is against God, and till we recognise the fact we shall have no sense of the benign decree of forgiveness which can alone remove it.

Let us not forget the lesson in the Psalmist's words. The reason why men sin is that they think so little of God and of the Godward aspects of sin; and society would not gain if our attention were entirely concentrated on social duties and their secular sanctions. If it becomes a habit to put God out of view, the sins men commit against each other will not be at all likely to decrease in volume and disappear. God is in those against whom we offend, and they could not be offended against, if it were otherwise. He is more to us than husband, wife, friend, and counsellor, and we can be guilty of no trespass against any of these which is not at the same time a trespass of

aggravated criminality against God Himself. If others have a claim upon our gratitude, virtue, fidelity, and honest service, His claim exceeds in its strength and sacredness. We can only deal with the problem of sin in our lives by dealing with God Himself, for He keeps in His own right hand the terms of settlement. It is He who can vindicate and indemnify those against whom we have trespassed, and silence the accusing voices which follow us in our pathway of folly and selfishness. "Who can forgive sin, but God alone?" The Scribes and Pharisees were right in their doctrine, although at sea in its application. "The Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sin." "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses;" and any view of sin which does not remember that God is grievously wronged by it, leaves us outside the economies of grace and destitute of the great crucial reconciliation.

X.

THE MALIGNITY OF SIN.

"That sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful."—ROMANS vii. 13.

THE section of Paul's argument in which our text stands is not only abstruse in form, but seems at the first glance to make God an indirect ally of evil. As we read this bit of self-portraiture, and see how the Divine commandment wrought within the apostle, and those of whom He is a type, all manner of covetousness, stirring up the sleeping virulence of evil, and working the tragedy of an inward death, our reverence receives a slight shock, and we are ready to ask the question, Can it be true that God tempteth no man? It is true that sin does this through a holy and perfect law, but the difficulty presents itself that it is God who has put this terrible instrument into the hands of sin. He had given facilities for this painful experiment of aggravating the moral mischief hidden in human souls.

The answer to the problem, of course, is twofold. It is a principle of the Divine government that

the power of sin must not be arrested by sheer force, for this would curtail that moral liberty which is the basis of the highest life of the universe. All the issues of conduct and character must be reached by methods of free, unrestricted proof. God leaves at the service of sin every weapon it may see fit to use, and so magnifies the resources of His own wisdom and power in its final subjugation. Man is obliged to tie down, as far as he is able, the resources of his adversary, and in war-time nations prohibit the export of arms which may possibly be used against themselves. God imposes no such limitations. He gives to sin every possible power and opportunity, so that it may overreach itself and make the final victory of holiness indisputable and complete.

He knows also that sin can only be destroyed through the complete disclosure of its innate repulsiveness. It will at last write the sentence of condemnation against itself. The specific manifestation sin reaches through both the requirements of the law, and the precepts of the Gospel is the guarantee of its ultimate disavowal by those who for a time may have been victimised by it. It was serving God's purpose by coming forth from its hiding-place and exhibiting its true nature in the mirror of the decalogue. God wanted to impeach sin before the tribunal of man's conscience, and make man ready for the gospel of salvation He allowed the law to be a theatre in which were disclosed and presented to a watching world its

plots, machinations, and malignancies. The loathing for sin thus created was a beginning of regeneration.

We are familiar with the attempts recently made to prevent disease by inducing mild and comparatively innocuous forms of it. Men of science are trying to make the physical constitution immune against consumption, malarial fever, plague, and even snake-bite, by cultivating into the blood the attenuated virus of these terrible maladies. The theory underlying such experiments is, that the attenuated virus eats up from the cells and tissues of the body all the substances upon which the devastating microbes and poisons of acute disease would otherwise fasten, and when the graver malady appears upon the scene to ravage and destroy, it finds itself forestalled. It is in the position of a cruel, murdering army, which wants to cross a tract of country, but finds it has been preceded by an army under humane and civilised leaders, which has consumed the food supplies and drained the wells, but has never ventured to violate human life. Is there not something like this in God's method of treating sin, as set forth in the argument of St Paul? Whether this method of dealing with disease is practicable or not, the theory may serve our purpose as an illustration. The holy Lawgiver, it is needless to say, never brings the virus of moral evil into a sane, pure nature, girt about with the protection of its own perfect innocence. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God."

But when spiritual disease, with all its risks, has already come into the life-blood of the race, He brings into the field a stern, rigorous law, which, for a time at least, seems to stimulate the latent sin in human nature into express, specific manifestation. He lets temporal sin assert its virulence within us, so that we may be saved from that dire fatality which Jesus described as "eternal sin." The milder form of it becomes a protection against its malignant and fatal developments, and helps in the recovery of spiritual health. The sin stirred up by an aggressive law consumes and destroys the ignorance, stupor, self-satisfaction, and all the various naturalistic elements within the soul, in which deadly and abiding growths of evil find a fertile soil. "Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, works in us all manner of covetousness." By thus setting forth in our conscious experience the exceeding sinfulness of sin, God makes ready for our complete salvation from it.

It is sometimes said that the doctrine of evolution makes the history of the Fall, as recorded in the book of Genesis and accepted by the New Testament writers, incredible. Whatsoever evil came into the race entered by imperceptible degrees, and not by a sudden act of disobedience. Man's ascent, when he moves upwards, is slow, and his descent, when he goes downwards, is equally slow. Whether we can fix a point at which degeneration began, and how far an allegorical element has been grafted into the primitive tradition, may be debatable questions;

but a Fall there has been, the latest evolutionists themselves being the judges. Man as we now find him is sometimes lower than the beasts of the field. Recent researches in the kingdoms of the animal world tend to show that the principles of altruism and mutual help prevail more admirably amongst some species than in even human societies. Admitting that evil did insinuate itself into human life by imperceptible degrees, and that primeval man had already downward tendencies, whilst the development of reason and moral sense was as yet incomplete, was there not all the more reason for the processes described by St Paul, through which man is led to see his own repulsiveness and liability to condemnation? The first man, or perhaps the human race in the person of some type or representative, was proved by a simple commandment suited to a state of elementary knowledge, and, alas! found wanting; and the race was again proved through the law proclaimed by Moses, as well as through the enactments of the lawgivers of all nations. One of the providential purposes hidden in every code of morals is not only to weld men together into a harmonious social adjustment, but to make men know themselves. In some way or other selfishness has infiltrated itself into human life, and corrupted its best instincts. It is often there in solution; and in all systems of law, whether partly or completely inspired, a providential design works itself out, through which human nature is brought to self-knowledge. The evil in solution

must be precipitated and crystallised into forms in which it will be recognised. Till this is done no step can be taken towards man's moral recovery. The more latent and unsuspected the evil, the greater the need for the order of treatment described by St Paul.

The law creates within us a new sense of the defiling and devastating work of sin. It focusses the mischief which is already at work, and compels us to recognise it, although Divine law is not designed, like some mistaken pieces of human legislation, to create new crime. We cannot fight with an invisible enemy; and the revelation of the law shows us the odious and formidable thing with which we have to contend.

The captain of a ship sailing in the South Seas ran short of fresh water, and, with some of his seamen, landed upon a beautiful island to fill their casks. They discovered at length a tempting mountain stream, to all appearance sweet, pure, and crystal-clean, and began to help themselves to the abounding store. Soon the natives rushed upon the scene, lifted their hands in deprecation, and tried to stop the work of the captain and his men by force. At first he could not understand the behaviour of the natives, who had the reputation of being friendly to white traders; but at length a man came forward who could speak English, and explained the scuffle. A leper settlement lay behind the shoulder of the hill, and the poor victims of that loathsome disease were in the habit of washing their clothes in

the upper courses of the stream. Poison, corruption, death were hiding unsuspected in the clear rippling waters and the placid pools amongst the rocks. There is often an undiscovered taint in the life whose surface current presents an outward show of virtue. A colourless danger lurks in the pursuits and pleasures to which we find ourselves prone, and of which we sometimes drink perhaps in disastrous ignorance. By the law God seeks to teach us the ruin with which sin is fraught. The law shows what frightful possibilities are hidden in sin, and impregnate even our own thoughts, and seeks thereby to turn us from all that is evil.

In studying the structure of plants the microscopist finds that his work is simplified when he can colour with contrasted dyes the different substances of the cells and tissues. He puts one chemical solution into the structure under examination, and the particles of starch become blue. He adds another solution, and the material of which the cell-walls are built up becomes red. His process does not create these substances, for they were there before he brought his skilful, tell-tale chemistry to bear. It simply brings them into unmistakable contrast, emphasis, and vivid colour. The bacillus of cholera, tuberculosis, and typhoid is invisible, and needs to be stained before it can be identified. And so with the processes of the Divine law. God does not put down the poison of sin and death into the channels of human life, but He seeks so to mark those channels

and to colour the unsuspected taint with red and crimson that we shall turn away with horror and loathing.

Sin was present in the human soul before the law came into play, and the risk of it was in the background before the first moral and responsible being was put to a simple test of obedience. The early estrangement from all that was right and Divine began generations before the Covenant with Noah or the signs and wonders on the terrible Mount of the Arabian desert. The passions struggling in man from the beginning have produced a chronic dissonance with the true meaning and purport of life. The law gave shape and definite feature to this insidious and impalpable egoism. It touched into a highly coloured legibility the germs of wrong which were slumbering in the secret recesses of human souls. By the law is the knowledge of sin. Till the law arouses and stimulates man's moral consciousness, there is an incipient paralysis of the sensibilities which is the immediate precursor of death. It is only after the law has brought its painful, authoritative teaching and discipline to bear that we begin to realise the evil which cleaves to us. We little suspect how grave is the spiritual derangement of which we are victims. Sin is a blind, dumb, incoherent malignity which secretly afflicts the soul, and it acquires a new and terrible power of expression through the law.

Beneath the fair and decorous life unsuspected

potentialities of evil lie buried, which must be brought to the surface. The law does not create the hidden wrong or even increase its actual sum. It simply exposes it. The work of cutting new roads in our tropical possessions is often attended with wide-spread and fatal outbreaks of malarial fever. The contractor has not prepared the poisonous exhalations in his laboratory. They have been sleeping in the ground for generations, and are brought to the surface and set free to play upon human life by the disturbance of the soil. And when God opens up His great highways of moral and spiritual law in human life, our morbid, insalubrious natures are stirred to their lowest depths. The sleeping evil is brought up out of depths of darkness, and the law works death in us by that which is good, so that sin becomes exceeding sinful.

Under the law sin shows itself as revolt against a personal God, and the transgression of a specific enactment. The commandment rests upon a fixed idea of authority, just, living, competent. We acknowledge no subjection to vanished dynasties of kings. In the promulgation of the law an eternal God plants Himself between sin and the soul it threatens to ravage and destroy. All the sanctions attaching to past manifestions of mercy and power give emphasis to the voice that speaks from the cloud-girt mountain. "I am the Lord thy God who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." After such a preamble, sin

could not impel a single step along forbidden paths without daring God's power to His face, and offering the gravest of insults to His providential love. All moral trespass must hereafter dishonour the majesty of Jehovah's throne, and desecrate the tenderness of His compassions. Just as the angel of the Lord planted himself in the path of the covetous prophet, as he was hemmed in right and left by the vineyard walls, so the Eternal places His own holy personality across those ways of death into which men, prompted by their base passions, venture alas to enter. Transgression must henceforth involve a sacrilege and a treason, to the gravity of which no revolt against human governments can offer a parallel.

In one of the frequent revolutions which disquiet the smaller South American republics, a British subject, it is said, was once condemned to death. The Consul disputed the justice of the sentence, and in the name of his sovereign sent in a strong official protest, only to find it treated with contempt. When the day and the hour fixed for the man's execution drew near, the Consul took his stand between the condemned man and the party told off to fire, wrapped himself in the flag of his country, and declared that if the prisoner were shot, he must be shot through Britain's flag and through the Consul's body. If we may use such an illustration without irreverence, does not God in the giving of the law forbid our sins in equally solemn and impressive ways? He makes His protest

against sin through the universal conscience of the race, and then, clothing Himself with all the majesty of His high prerogatives, and asserting His claim through past providences of mercy and salvation, He plants Himself between sin and the human soul. If sin gets its will and its way in us, it can only be through a criminal insult to the person, power, and prerogative of the Eternal. The presumption to which sin can drive men is clearly seen, and through the commandment sin becomes exceeding sinful.

The very prohibitions of law provoke a temper of resentfulness by which the alienation of the heart from God may be measured. "I had not known lust except the law had said, 'Thou shalt not covet.'" Over and above the offences to which our natural passions may impel us, there is a depraved wilfulness which brings the soul into direct antagonism to the counsels of the Most High. Sin is not produced from the animal elements in man's nature only, but is the symptom of a wicked mistrust of the Lawgiver. When wholesome and reasonable restraints imposed for the just regulation of conduct are resisted, it shows a soul rifled of faith in the Divine goodness. An entirely wrong conception of God must surely possess us if we think the things forbidden are pleasant, and the things enjoined irksome and intolerable. The fact that the law should raise a storm of opposition within us, proves that we account God an enemy,

and that Paul's interpretation of the carnal mind as enmity against God was true. If men loved and trusted God, they would never want to do what He deprecates, and least of all would they want to do it because it is displeasing in His sight. A profound and daring Scotch theologian has said, "The tendency of all sin is to Deicide"; and the implacable temper of an unregenerate man confronted with the demands of Divine law proves the truth of the terrible saying.

Men try to disguise the issue which is put before them, and treat moral lawlessness as though it had no serious import. They refuse to get behind the earthly, common-place sanctions of social morality. Prove your God, prove that He has a personal life, prove that He has indeed made His will known to men before you claim Divine sacredness for law, and make these stupendous affirmations of all that is implied in disobedience to the code of either Moses or Jesus Christ. It may be as difficult to prove the personality of God by a syllogism as it is to prove human personality; but we are persuaded of both facts, and they are implicit in our sense of right and wrong. Duties have no relevance in an impersonal world, and assert themselves within us to regulate conscious, sentient, rational relationships. The sense of right infixed at the centre of being is higher than the self to which it is often opposed. It comes forth from a personality which is superhuman. Every man who feels the majesty

of right recognises it is one of the higher voices which is speaking, none other, indeed, than the voice of the Eternal. It is in the God of the burning Mount that "we live and move and have our being," and the giving of the law is an everlasting fact. God is as near to us as to the trembling Israelites in the wilderness, and He speaks to us not only by the prophets and mediators of the past, but by an undying voice within us. The commandment is upon our hearts, and the Divine Lawgiver writes it afresh every day. Sin involves as much distrust and contempt of God as in the ancient days, and by the commandment is made to set itself forth as exceeding sinful.

The commandment shows the exceeding sinfulness of sin by putting all its typical forms into admonitory association with each other. It suggests that an organic unity binds together the varied developments of evil. All sins against the corporate interest of the race, all anti-social offences it redefines from a religious standpoint. Every wanton and selfish act lies against the honour of God and the common welfare of the race. Under the law, a man's displeasure at the wrong done to himself became the measure of his condemnation of a principle of evil which ramified through all the relationships to either earth or heaven in which he could be placed. One and the same self-aggrandising motive impelled the hand that stole, the feet that were swift to shed blood, and the tongue that condemned the innocent

or spake proud things against God. The watchword of the law, promulgated by Buddha, was "All life is one, from that of the least to the greatest." "All sin is one" was the watchword of the law promulgated by Moses. Idolatry, irreligion, theft, adultery, the covetous thought were modifications of one primary temper of wickedness. In the last analysis the motive was essentially the same. Jesus traced all obedience to a root of love, and James traced all disobedience to a counter principle. He who offends in one point, is guilty of all. A deadly poison may be put into phials of various shapes and sizes, it may be tinctured with different dyes, adapted to divergent tastes, and yet it has the same essential properties. All sin is one. Of course the exigencies of our social life compel us to mete out to it lighter or heavier penalties as the case may be; but these differences belong to a world whose fashion is passing away. The law reveals the oneness and radical affiliation of every form of evil. A diabolic solidarity binds together all separate and divergent sins, and they are consolidated into fellowship with sin everywhere. Our particular trespass is but one item in the sum of the world's revolt against God. Upon the generation which crucified Christ, the blood of the righteous Abel as well as the blood of Zacharias, the latest Jewish martyr, was to come; so sin in its every separate act and distinctive age must bear the accumulated condemnation of that whole to which it supplies a constituent part. The law affiliates to each other all the

prevailing types of sin, and in this way sin becomes "exceeding sinful."

The law also brings home to us the heinousness of sin by illustrating the disaster wrought by it in the human soul. "Working death in me by that which is good." When the conscience has become mute, insensate, unresponsive, it is often necessary to reinforce its functions by an appeal to fear. Some minds can only be taught to appreciate the seriousness of sin through a foretaste of its bitter and distressing results. The Jewish law seemed to savour of terrorism, and in some of its articles, judged from our humane standpoint, was gruesomely lavish of death penalties. But the penal code, no less than the rites of the temple, was symbolic, and appointed to convey the truth that inward death was the inevitable issue of unmourned and unexpiated sin. Sin was the parent of death, as that dire incident presented itself to the minds of those who were made to be heirs of immortality. It was impossible to contemplate the law without being impressed with this fact. It is of death that men everywhere stand in dread, and they have agreed to make the taking of life the foremost of all crimes. Death, so far as we are able to trace out its issues, disfigures what is comely, corrupts what is pleasing, stifles all music into a haunting stillness, cuts in twain the fellowships of home, wrenches men from the green and blooming Edens in which they nestle, and casts the shadow of a great darkness. The death wrought by sin through the commandment is more hideous

still. It produces a more evil disfigurement, silences rarer music, dissolves sublimer fellowships, issues in a more tragic soul-darkness. Death, the wages of sin, is inseparable from its work. Sin is an infernal machine put within us to work death, and it achieves at last the will of him who was a murderer from the beginning. The law was meant to show this. There is no terror which sin will not call up, no grief with which it will not stab, no disaster from which it shrinks. It works death in us by the hand of a just and benign law, and we must look that death in the face before we can find salvation. A specialist directed one of his patients to walk across the floor of his consulting room, and to step carefully within certain lines woven into the pattern of the carpet. The failure to do so was a symptom of the obscure spinal disease from which he was suffering, and an omen of the no very distant end. And God tests us within the lines of the law. We show that we have the fatal sentence in our natures when we cannot order our steps according to God's word. The diagram of aberrations is our death-warrant. The law brings home to us the doom against which we may fight, but to which we are surely drifting, and works death in us through that which is good. From this death there is a deliverance, and it is to bring about that deliverance that the depressing fact is forced upon our attention.

The tendency of the day is to make little of the sinfulness of sin, if not, indeed, to look upon the word

itself as obsolete. Of course we honour Paul, but his view was coloured by a Jewish training, a pragmatical temper, and the stern gloomy world in which he lived. We are here to enjoy ourselves and to make the world less of a Lent and more of a Carnival. Christianity itself must go unless it can accommodate itself to the new temper. A religion which talks too much of sin, and of the method of dealing with it, is out of date.

This tendency to gloss over the guilt of transgression or to ignore it altogether must be explained by complex causes, some of which are at work in all ages, and some of which are peculiar to our own time. There is an extraordinary forgetfulness of the moral factors which enter into all human actions. The catchwords of a superficial materialism are on the lips of the man in the street, and the necessary problems of physical well-being monopolise thought, ingenuity, studious attention, whilst spiritual problems are looked upon as irrelevant to the hour, if not insoluble. We have contemplated the tragedies of passion with so much sustained attention, that we have ceased to note the governing will-forces that sleep behind the animal tempest. Man is thought of as though he were a being with a sceptre for self-rule, like the wand of an elf, and tossed by the cyclonic passions of a leviathan. Sin, with some of our instructors, is of no more account than a yawn, a cough, or a sneeze. Necessarian interpretations of heredity dominate the hour, and

man is depicted as though his coarseness and sensuality were a survival of the animal within him, rather than the deliberate welcome given to a new devil he is quite competent to dismiss from his door. Sin we are told is a lesion of the brain, and many a man has gone to the gallows who ought to have been kindly coddled in a lunatic asylum. This may be true, and to draw the line between insanity and crime needs painful care and enormous knowledge. But the converse is quite conceivable, that many a man is pampered in an asylum who ought to have been treated as a criminal. Our fiction writers often administer insinuating soporifics to the popular conscience, and help to minimise the sinfulness of sin. Odious transgressions are painted in ludicrous associations, and moral obliquity is made to minister to our sense of fun. The prophet who denounces wrong is an amusing crank. Other writers make grievous miscreants the victims of fate, and take away all space for healthy, wholesome condemnation of wrong-doing. Our sympathies are often engaged by the craft of the novelist on the sinning side. The stage presents to its spectators scenes of adultery and drunkenness which excite loud laughter and ringing cheers. Can we imagine Jesus Christ who wept over Jerusalem, and who had a fine delicate sense of humour, laughing over the comedy of sin? We can never allow men of flagitious conduct to occupy positions of honour without a loss of moral sensibility. Tuft-

hunting, civic etiquette, and spurious political loyalty, cannot fail to attenuate our sense of the repulsiveness of sin when those to whom we pay our adulation happen to be moral delinquents and racing-men. It has been shrewdly said that the present generation needs to make a new pilgrimage to Mount Sinai.

A solid evangelical theology rests upon a right interpretation of the grim, irrefutable fact of sin. Men flippantly tell us that the present day is too enlightened to listen to the doctrines of a vicarious atonement, and that hell is a nightmare at which our generation in its new awakening laughs. Have such men that sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, which makes them competent to affirm or to deny upon these solemn questions? If we have no just grasp of that tremendous interpretation of sin which God has been bringing home to us by the law, we can, of course, do without a cross; or at least we shall be content with a cross planted in a sentimental quagmire, rather than upon a foundation of adamant. If sin is the petty trifle delineated in the literature of modern science and romance, rather than the haggard, ingrained deformity of life depicted in the law, we may rightly look upon the Bible doctrine of retribution as an excrescence upon the religion of whose sunnier side we are adherents. But the spurious optimism which ignores these things is wide of all honest facts, and excites the contempt of men like Huxley, who says in a letter to Darwin,

when he had been invited to lend his support to the representative of some new, rose-coloured phase of Broad Church teaching, "I confess I have less sympathy with the half and half sentimental school which he represents than I have with thorough-going orthodoxy."

"As a matter of fact men sin and the consequences of their sin affect endless generations of their progeny. Men are tempted; men are punished for the sins of others without merit or demerit of their own; and they are tormented with their evil deeds as long as their consciousness lasts."

In another letter he says, "It is the secret of the superiority of the best theological teachers to the majority of their opponents, that they substantially recognise these realities of things, however strange the forms in which they clothe their conceptions." After enumerating some of the gloomy tenets of the Calvinistic theology, he goes on to say, "Faulty as the doctrines are, they appear to me to be vastly nearer the truth than the liberal popular illusions that babies are all born good, and that the example of a corrupt society is responsible for their failure to remain so; that all partial evil is universal good, and other optimistic figments, such as that which represents providence under the guise of a paternal philanthropist, and bids us believe that everything will come right (according to our notions) at last."

The sombre reflections suggested by the apostle's view of sin, and his explanation of the part played

by the law in making us realise its guiltiness, are not intended to darken our lives but to make us feel our need of Jesus Christ. A Jesus Christ who is fading out of our consciousness implies a defective perception of the enormity of transgression, because sin and the appointed Saviour from sin are seen by the same set of faculties, focussed to one view-point. We shall never get back our faith in the grand fact of an ever-present redemption till we let the law do its proper work within us, by creating a just sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

XI.

THE CROSS-CURRENTS OF CHARACTER.

"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part Thou shalt make me to know wisdom." —PSALM li. 5, 6.

ROUSSEAU, whom Carlyle not unjustly describes as a "blackguard," has given to the world a series of self-revelations almost unparalleled in shamelessness, putridity, and complacent pride. In commending his "confessions" to the notice of the public he says, "Let the trumpet of the day of judgment sound when it will, I will present myself before the Sovereign Judge with this book in my hand. I will say, This is what I have done, what I have thought, what I was. I have told the good and bad with equal frankness. I have neither omitted anything bad nor interpolated anything good. I have shown myself as I was, mean and contemptible, good, high-minded, and sublime, according as I was one or the other. I have unveiled my inmost self, even as Thou hast seen it, O Eternal Being. Gather round me the

countless hosts of my fellow-men; let them hear my confessions, lament for my unworthiness, and blush for my imperfections. Then let each of them in turn reveal with the same frankness at the foot of the throne the secrets of his heart and say if he dare 'I was better than that man.'" Such a prelude to such a disclosure we at once resent. The dissolute and unprincipled man there attempts to play the Pharisee, and ejects cynical insinuations against all possible critics of his unwholesome performance. The publican also thanks God that bad as he may be, he is in no sense abnormal, and he challenges fellow-sinners all and sundry, to cast the first stone, if they dare. He prides himself in narrating specific acts of shame that ought to have been buried in the darkness, and is a spurious penitent, in the dress of a grimacing clown, without sigh or down-bent eyes. But in this loathesome book we may, at least, see a witness to the contending elements which always assert themselves in the human personality. The soul is a crystal in which we may watch the grimmest of battles, although happily the tide of victory often turns in favour of that higher self which the breath of God keeps alive within us. Depraved instincts and the voice of a Divine law of progress both speak within us, and the two cannot be brought into unison.

The laws of some countries are a tangle of earlier and later codes not altogether consistent with each other. Primitive usages are kept up side by side with observances brought in by conquerors, and the

coalescence is incomplete. Villages of the same empire present a stage of civilisation differing from that of towns and cities. The stone-age and the age of steel are jumbled together on one continent and often under one crown. Rites and ceremonies, practised before the dawn of the Christian era, mixed up with every type of Christianity turn it into a conglomerate. Herein may we not see a symbol of our own nature which does not always govern itself by mutually consistent principles? It sometimes obeys a coarse, elemental birth-law, and again it yields itself to the promptings of a lofty inspiration. There is no man in whom this conflict does not show itself with more or less of distinctness. Contrasted facts which few would venture to challenge are announced in our text, and each fact is preceded by a note of exclamation. We find ourselves addressed by two voices—the voice of a low fleshly ancestry which being dead yet speaketh; and the voice of a high spiritual sovereignty. We hear the clash as they contend in the experiences of the Psalmist, in the soul of St Paul, and in the inner history of the vain, unwholesome, vapouring Deist who was a precursor of the French Revolution. Our descent is mixed, touching both the beast and the great hierarchies of heaven; and these innate dualisms often confuse and perplex us by their signs.

In his volume of war correspondence entitled *From London to Ladysmith*, Mr Winston Church-

hill tells of a curious incident which arose in the neighbourhood of the besieged city. The commander of the forces whose movements he was following, was encamped only a few miles from Sir George White, and wished to encourage him after one of his brave attempts to break through the investing ranks of the enemy. Signals were flashed upon the clouds which, under ordinary circumstances, would have been easy for those in Ladysmith to decipher. But the Boers perceived what was being done and confused the messages, by throwing their own search-light between the clouds and the eager eyes which were trying to spell out the code. And so the battle of the opposing signals went on mid-heaven. That weird spectacle is not unknown to the human consciousness. Conflicting messages register themselves there, messages from the animal and messages from the spiritual side of our personality, the alphabet of heaven mixing itself up into chaos with the alphabet of the nethermost pit. No wonder we should sometimes be baffled. Have we learned to distinguish the lower from the higher messages which inscribe themselves within us? Upon our skill and rapidity of interpretation the momentous question may turn — which kingdom of forces is to prevail in our destiny?

In the first statement the Psalmist explains the enigma of the Fall, not as a tradition of history only, but as it has touched him in his day and generation. It is no misadventure which had overtaken him mid-

way in his course through life. His guilt did not come through transitory hallucination and unwatchfulness. He has acted according to his nature, his lower nature it is true, but a nature shaped under the pressure of prenatal disasters. In the second statement he explains the enigma of his rise out of foulness and degradation. He is feeling his way from the gulfs of evil up into higher and holier things, because there is an insistent and august demand within him which will not be refused. Both facts are amazing and discrepant with a peculiar sharpness. The one fact is an appeal to the Divine pity, for this writer is at one and the same time a wilful transgressor and a victim of cumulative ancestral impulse towards evil. The second fact is a basis of recovered responsibility and a fresh summons to hope.

1. *A sinister birth-law has been at work to derange the character and disfigure the personality.* "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." The Psalmist affirms more than the simple fact that man is a physical organism with fleshly appetites imbedded in its structure. Such appetites have a providential purpose to serve in human life, and the flesh within which they move is not inherently evil. The creative fiat might have conjoined pure unfallen spirit with a substance in which passions inhere, and no defilement need have been suffered through the contact, for these opposing interests could have made for themselves a just working agreement. Till the higher life had entirely

mastered the lower it is even conceivable that there would have been a state of transient struggle. Man was an animal organism, if we may trust our science, before he became a responsible being, and up to the time that moral distinctions had recorded themselves within his sensibilities, wrong could not attach to the various impulses which determined his actions. Reproach begins when man after receiving his higher endowments continues an animal organism, and nothing more. Well-reined passion and an unspotted soul are not incongruous.

The Psalmist's statement goes beyond the superficial assumption that moral evil is a poison deposit in the channels of the physical life only. The taint is common to the two sides of the nature. He had scrutinised his own inner experiences too closely to be led away by the old error that evil was a property of matter, and that pure spirit moved in a plane immune from the infection. He knew full well that the interaction between body and mind was so close that the higher faculties could not escape the disease attaching to the lower, like a handful of clean, healthy survivors in a colony of lepers. After leaving the shaping hand of God, the flesh had acquired evil properties, and this deterioration took its rise in the very roots of the moral and spiritual life. The flesh. in its symptoms of derangement recorded a lapse that had its origin in the sphere of the unseen. The intellectual faculties had been schooled to do the bidding of the inferior passions, and the moral affections had

long bowed themselves to a degrading and unholy yoke. The entire personality was in a house of evil bondage, and all its powers had been prostituted to wrong uses.

It is said that in countries ravaged by cholera the fell disease will sometimes go down one side of a street and leave the other untouched. Sin never devastates upon such a partial and eccentric principle, but makes havoc with the fleshly and the spiritual sides of man's being alike. It creeps into the beginnings of life and its allurements are congenital. It is no mishap which befalls men when they are well on in life, nor is it an acquired disability which appears in some fierce crisis of temptation only. The taint is in the embryonic cell and a blight falls upon the opening buds and blooms of life. It is this which makes the problem grave, and if this were all would plunge us into hopelessness. Sin has the kind of inveteracy which is sometimes described as "bred in the bone."

But it often seems as though the birth-law of evil had acquired a fatal priority in its operation, whilst the second law came upon the field somewhat late in the day. Perhaps it is not really so, for the grosser promptings may be more easily retained in the memory of some men than their subtler inclinations to good. Innate propensities to wrong are hard to eradicate, because they reach so far back into our origins. Indeed, the philosophers of the slime tell us that Nature lends her sanctions more obviously

to self-indulgence than to self-restraint, and assert that men cannot be made to go against their elemental instincts. Self-realisation is as valid as altruism. Shameful acts it is affirmed are natural to the doers of them. It is only too common to excuse depravity and odious degeneration by the plea that those whom we class as abnormal sinners simply do that which is within them—within them from their birth. To repress the flesh tends to beget hypocrisy, of all evils surely one of the worst. We must go back to naturalistic religions, and cease to aim at that which is beyond us. The higher Semitic faiths have expected too much from human nature, and to enact laws with an underlying groundwork of Christian ideals beneath them is to legislate for angels when our object should be to humour the brute. The State must cater for the passions of its subjects, and prepare for infirmities inevitable to the flesh. The historic vices are in the tissues of the race, and it is useless building for the human spirit a nest amongst the stars. A ruling note in too much present-day literature is that man is animal, and that churches and creeds, laws and disciplines cannot make him otherwise. Of life, as man knows it, pleasure is the supreme end, and to look upon human existence from other standpoints is to show ourselves futile dreamers. Conduct is a fruit of complex historic necessities, and sin, like death itself, is viewed as an unwelcome fate. But this is only one side of the fact, for we are heirs of con-

flicting antecedents and contrasted environments, and the dualistic struggle of the past has been just as real as that of the present. If man is animal, and animal only, by what curious chance did goodness get into the world at all; and how came men to dream of it? Why did a small elect rise above the level of its forefathers? The law of passion does not prove the last word in human development. The Psalmist admits these coarse earthward instincts. A fateful blight rests upon the beginning of life, but the blight is not all.

In the priority of this unhappy birth-law no just argument can be found for submission to the evil propensities which brood in human life. The first impulse which seizes upon sentient beings is not thereby proved to be the best. The biologist speaks of the law of recapitulation in the growth of a child. In the unborn stages a human being passes through changes which link him into affinity with inferior orders of life; and after emerging into separateness of life he is successively an ape, a savage, a pugilist, and last of all a knight of chivalry, answering to the calls of an urbane civilisation. Such a description of his genealogy often does scant justice to the virtue of the beast. But this criticism apart, may he not rise higher than the last category in this ascending scale by obeying an inner voice? Once an ape, or a savage, or a pugilist, he is not compelled to be always an ape, a savage, a pugilist. The necessities of progress detach him from lower

and make him answerable to higher laws. If one stage is to replace another in his history, the primal instincts must cease to be the dominant forces of his behaviour. Education, no less than religion, is an entire mistake if he is to be stereotyped into the form determined by an evil birth-law. It is madness to accept the first wild propensities of the blood as rules of action. Because of our complex ancestry many conflicting voices speak within us, and it is impossible to obey them all. The science of life consists in selecting the note which is to guide us. We are wisely made helpless and put under a strong restraining hand till we can discriminate between these confused notes, and find the message which brings life indeed. The history of all progress shows that the flesh is but a perishable substratum in which the nobler growths of the character find their first nursery-ground. The lower must confess itself lower and make way for that which is higher. The beastial and the Divine are struggling together in every soul; and to say Nature sides with that which is base, and appetite must be allowed controlling power, is infatuation and suicide. Man is no longer an animal when the voice of God speaks within him, and by continuing to lead the animal life he covers himself with indelible infamy. The Bible candidly faces the facts of human nature, but it assures us the lower range of facts is not final. "Shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin!" All too true, and herein lies an appeal to the Divine pity. But sin is sin all the

same, and if the flesh has mastered us and arrested our ascent, we ought to feel sore and burning shame.

2. *The Psalmist speaks of a mighty demand which resists the innate promptings of the heart to evil, and is an earnest of better and nobler things.* The second fact is just as real as the first, although its root influences defy the perceptions of the senses. The bias towards evil conveyed to us from a faithless and degenerate ancestry is not the only force to be reckoned with. The Bible, unlike the voluptuous literature of our modern realist, takes no one-sided view of human nature. Men of the world see in the temperaments they profess to study the ferment of low passion, and have no sense of the rare secret incentives operating within the coarsest types of human character. The Psalmist felt in his own soul, however embruted the conditions towards which it might sometimes sink, the insistence of an ever-active will of holiness. Inward and outward disciplines alike converged to rescue him from the illusions of the senses, and create a movement of the soul towards truth and spiritual wisdom.

The partisan dissector of human life leaves this second fact out of his demonstration, and looks upon any sign of it as a hectic and overstrained idealism which encourages affectation and hypocrisy. Where conduct is candidly and habitually animal, an inference is rashly drawn that the moral centre of man is a vacuum, and that no sacred struggle, how-

ever faint, is in process there. No sure sign of anything beyond a foul welter of passion appears, and under the form of a man there grovels the soul of a brute. But it is not fair to reason thus. We can rightly define man only by bringing into the reckoning all his conscious experiences, however faint and rudimentary. We do not interpret the problems common to the race with conscientious accuracy, unless we scrutinise the soul, and see if any sign of this second fact be there. We must put the two experiences together. The Bible, which explores with preternatural keenness all indications of the unseen, as well as the rude records of the senses, asserts it, and asserts it of every man. It is part of our belief in the Spirit of God, and we had better drop the article from our creed, and profess a Manichean faith in evil, if our view of human life begins, continues, and ends, in undiluted sensualism. In the man sickeningly akin to the brute God presses home his requirement with secret, persevering urgency.

Truth and wisdom become immanent in us through the mystery of the Divine immanence itself, and are burnt into our deepest fibres by ten thousand fiery and long-continued disciplines. The ethical inspiration which arises within us outlasts the lower impulses. The one is enduring, the other short-lived, as is fitting. When the passions have sunk down into ashes, this royal mandate speaks in the bosom with immortal vigour. The series of inward acts

which tend to inform the mind with holy wisdom is never broken. This inbreathed truth, which is the anti-toxin to inbred depravity, is more than a passing demand. In the second clause of his sentence, which is not verbal iteration only, there is a sublime evangelical advance. "Thou shalt make me to know wisdom." God is more than a lawgiver who proclaims His behest once for all; He is an inward Saviour.

The Psalmist intimates that this wisdom of the Spirit, which opposes the will of the flesh and implants the promise of a better life, *begins in the most secret recesses of the being*. He looks upon inherited evil as an exterior force misshaping life in its first organic stages, rather than as a voice from the central profound. If the birth-sin must be looked upon as inward, that which works as its counterpoise is more unsearchably inward. It is from a well deeper than that in which inbred corruption festers that the truth arises whose streams of purifying movement seek to touch all that lies on the surface of the being. We are not saved unless the process begins at the germ-point from which the faculties radiate, and is behind and underneath the very core of the self. When malarial poison has entered into every drop of the blood, plaisters and palliatives, scarifications and counter-irritants are vain. Some effectual and far-reaching agent must be found which can sterilise the ever-multiplying microbes passing through the veins into the remotest organs of the body. A district nurse may go into the poor stricken home, and wash

the victim of a malignant disease, and her ministry is admirable ; but a clean skin, a smooth pillow, a tiny nosegay by the bedside, and a trim, sweet room are mitigations of the dreary mischief only. One must needs come through the door who can eradicate malignity at its roots, and set new virtues to work within the hidden springs of the life. In God's thought and method the inward must be first and foremost. " In the inward part Thou shalt make me to know wisdom." Here He touches us most closely, and touches us from an unexplored centre, so fitting us to appear before the glory of His face.

This inward ethical wisdom is the root which furnishes virtue to all the outspreading parts of the life. Conscience often seems to dwell alone, like some white survivor from shipwreck in the midst of a race of blacks. It represents a higher order, but is august in its isolation, aloof from surrounding life. And yet the time will come when it will find an ally in every part of the being in which it has been set, when its discernments will inform the senses which so often resent its mandate, ramifying into eyes, ears, finger-tips, till the man himself has become an organised conscience. Resistance to unholy allurements will be as instinctive as the recoil from pain and response to the things that are " pure, lovely, and of good report," as eager and unreserved as that of the senses to the pulse of a new spring, or the delights of an unfolding summer. " In the hidden part Thou shalt make me to know wisdom."

The tyranny of the baser birth-nature notwithstanding, there is an accent and a forecast of victory in the Psalmist's words. God does more than demand truth; He discovers wisdom to our deepest consciousness. He neither relaxes His requirement nor forsakes His chosen task. No error is unchastened, no foolish outbreak condoned. He will not be put off with a shallow obedience to social expediences, or consent to limit the terms of His precepts to the so-called practical interests of our common life. His demands are enforced by the pressure of holy severities tireless as His own strength. We do not need to impose penances upon our bodies, or endure them at the dictate of fellow-mortals, for our lives are crowded with providential penances more wholesome and impressive than any which human wit can devise. All self-flagellations tend to divert attention from God's strokes, and lacking authority, must be either fatal to hope or uncertain in their issues. God's severities are fraught with promise, and press home Divine codes of thought and conduct till every instinct answers to His bidding. No fault, however obscure, is overlooked. The vigilant and unerring aim directed from the unseen upon all our shortcomings is a hint to us of the tribunal before which we are ever standing. God's methods are not to be baffled, and we shall know the truth whether we are pleased to follow it or not.

In a review of the life of Pasteur, it is said: "Primitive man fought against the wolf, the tiger,

and the destroying serpent. At the present time man is fighting against foes of human life, equally terrible, although not patent to the eye—the microbe of disease. The time will come when it will be as unheard-of a thing for a man to die of diphtheria, scarlet fever, cholera, or tuberculosis, in Berlin, Paris, or London, as it is for a man to die there by the tooth of the tiger or the fang of the snake." The prophecy in medicine yet waits to be fulfilled; but if God is at work in the kingdom of human souls, we may venture upon a more daring and romantic forecast. The moralist, social reformer, philanthropist, fight against the wild-beast fury of lust, drunkenness, robbery, murder, and not always with complete success. In the realm of the invisible, God is combating evils, follies, corruptions, which enter into the human soul through obscure channels and devastate it as wofully as rampant vices. His inner methods are bringing complete salvation near. However forlorn the present outlook, not only will crime one day disappear, but unspiritual tempers will be as rare in the great centres of Christendom as crimes are now. The worst may hope. God does not peal forth His demands with a voice like that of a trumpet, and then passively wait till mankind rises up to meet them. His activity is joined to His behests, and His methods cannot fail. "Thou shalt make me to know wisdom." The truth overflows with outreaching and indestructible hope.

From this second fact a new doctrine of responsi-

bility emerges. God not only presents inward, ethical truth for our acceptance, but He so works as to compel the perception and acknowledgment of that which is best. Self-deceiving men try to justify themselves in their thraldom to passion by listening to the lower voice only, and turn away from the higher voice which rises up out of their consciousness. But it cannot honestly be ignored. The second fact is an integral part of our being; and to frame a science of life without including it, is like preparing a handbook of anatomy upon the basis of the fables which tell of one-legged and one-eyed races. The immanence of the Divine Spirit within us creates an obligation which covers all the sides and aspects of our seen and unseen life. Man is not a pile of earth-gravitating lusts and appetites, but is a pupil of the Infinite Wisdom, and will have to be judged in that relation. In the home, in the world, in the secret place of his own spirit, he is always furnishing subject-matter for the Divine tribunal. He is shapen in sin, and such misfortune calls for the Divine pity; but the pity shows itself as God takes him in hand, and teaches a higher law than that of the flesh. And thus our disturbed responsibilities are put upon a basis which cannot be shaken. If God presses home His precepts, and makes us to know wisdom, all things are morally possible to us.

A recent book from the pen of an accomplished American, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, will probably make a landmark in the history of

serious thinkers. In one of his chapters, Mr William James shows by many examples, that sudden and complete conversions occur under almost every form of belief. Roman Catholics and Protestants, Hindoos and Mahommedans, people without a religious training or ancestry, sometimes pass from a death of sin to a life of righteousness, and that too, without any anticipation on their own part of the coming change. The theory suggested by this psychologist, who is not a dogmatic Christian believer, is that the forces which bring about these sudden transformations arise within the subliminal consciousness. Human personality is made up of two halves, one illuminated and the other in darkness; one consisting of thoughts, purposes, feelings, brain-movements of which we are fully aware, and the other an unexplored realm of potential consciousness, a neglected dumping-ground perhaps of the ghostly thoughts and feelings which visited our successive ancestors millenniums ago. This subliminal consciousness may perhaps be compared to the coal deposits which absorbed the light and heat of the sun myriads of ages back, and give them back again for our use to-day. It is hinted that the elements of this buried consciousness suddenly thrust themselves into view, and change the complexion of the life by a half-miraculous revolution. Can the thoughts and ethical instincts of people who lived centuries upon centuries ago survive and acquire a resurrection in the sudden conversion of

their descendants? Are the profligate men whose habits are strangely transformed really the descendants of a long line of saintly forefathers? Was there a race which maintained its innocence for thousands of years, so that a priceless deposit of its virtues was left in the sub-consciousness of far-off descendants, to form the basis of a sudden conversion? Why should the subliminal consciousness possess holier potentialities than the ordinary work-a-day consciousness? The theory is interesting, but it seems to me that another interpretation will get nearer home to the facts. This obscure and mysterious half of the personality is the sphere within which an unseen God is teaching truth and wisdom; and these startling varieties of religious conversion amongst men of diverse creeds and races points to the brooding Spirit of God, which is everywhere, moving upon the deep and silent recesses of human life. God is making men to know wisdom in the inward parts. When will His energy in us break forth into conversion and the changed life?

Two voices speak within us, the voice of our birth-sin and the voice of a sacred inspiration which rises up from dimmer abysses than even the birth-sin; and we become holy or otherwise by choosing to which of the two voices we will listen. Our vices and our virtues only half belong to us till this elective crisis arrives. As life glides on from stage to stage it tends to become more and more

a cumulative series of such elective acts. No character is possible to us apart from this process of choosing between the discrepant alternatives which lie side by side in the mysterious natures we possess. A recent book on human personality and its survival after death, affirms that not one but many personalities hide within us, which is perhaps an exaggeration. We make our own personalities, which for the present are only half-grown, and the multiplex germinal personalities which seem to lie within us are fleeting shapes that may or may not cohere into the coming entity of which we shall be finally conscious. For all ethical purposes the dualism of the Psalmist and St Paul sufficiently sets forth the factors which are seeking to build themselves into our unending life. There may be embryonic legions of evil within, and adumbrations also of the spirits from before the throne, but our personality, when consummated, will be a unity either pure and perfect in its goodness or unmixed and incurable evil. Let us listen to the higher voice, and follow the nobler leading, surrendering ourselves daily to those gracious and sacred promptings which ultimately prevail in all docile natures over the baser birth-laws.

XII.

THE MYSTERY OF THE NEW BIRTH.

"Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit."—JOHN iii. 7, 8.

THESE words were addressed to Nicodemus the doubter, who, in spite of his punctilious Pharisaism, had a larger share of the Sadducees' temper than he knew. They are intended to rebuke his distrust of the unknown forces which create a new spiritual consciousness and habit of life in men. This ruler of the Jews, by making the question physical, had sought to belittle with bland ridicule the great Teacher's insistence upon the new birth. Nicodemus imports into the colloquy the subject of parentage in its grossest form, a sheer irrelevancy, for the birth demanded as the condition of entrance into a spiritual kingdom is obviously spiritual, and a spiritual birth must be effected by spiritual processes.

This perversion of the Teacher's message arose, of course, from the unbelief of Nicodemus, an un-

belief the more blameworthy because the Pharisee had confessed his faith in the superhuman power of Jesus. He believed in the wonders wrought by the Prophet of Nazareth, but not in the transcendent power of the Spirit who inspired and possessed this wonderful personality. He was a type of many who are credulous of all kinds of signs and wonders, but draw a line at the signs and mighty works wrought within the human soul. Jesus stoops to the infirmities and limitations of his guest, and suggests that even physical nature has its unseen and inscrutable processes, processes which an uncircumcised Greek would recognise with reverence and awe. Many of its forces have about them the marks of a sovereignty we are neither able to interrogate nor comprehend. Had this rabbi, mortified and repelled as he was by the doctrine of the new birth, forgotten that Ezekiel in his vision of the dry bones ascribes life-giving power to the winds of heaven? He who hath life in Himself makes the winds His messengers, and they bring not to the aged only, but to those long dead, the secret of a new birth. When the Spirit came upon the disciples as a mighty rushing wind, filling the house where they were gathered together, some of them would recall the Master's words about "the wind" blowing "where it listeth." He came not to confer gifts of tongues and healings only, but to teach the secret of a new life, making the proud humble, the hard tender, the ignorant wise, the unclean holy and meet for the kingdom.

These words are a miniature parable, in which Jesus speaks of the renewing work of the Spirit under the symbol of the wind. In the scheme of Nature there are prefigurations of the forces operating in the kingdom of which He is head and interpreter. The scepticisms of Nicodemus and his class are condemned by what we may daily see around us. Are not vitalising agencies at work in the visible world, which, to a great extent, elude the senses? And mysterious, life-giving movements take place within the human soul no less than upon the face of Nature. From the intangible and the formless wind the Spirit of God has chosen to take the chief emblem of His work, and His own ever-sacred name. It may be a question whether the term was derived from a primitive stage of Nature-worship, and set apart to designate the Divine Being, or whether the original name for the Godhead, used in an incorrupted form of early religion, was debased, and introduced at length into a system of Nature-worship. Long before civilisations began, the simple-hearted men who saw God in all things, perhaps looked upon the wind as God's breath, just as they thought thunder His mighty voice in the clouds, and lightning the majesty of His presence.

There was a forecast of scientific truth in the prescientific age which held that the secret of life was hidden in the winds. We are told in the present day that all organic life must be traced back to the sun. But the wind is the messenger of the

sun, distributing its gifts through the length and breadth of the world. It equalises the contrasted temperatures which prevail, and changes hot, arid deserts into fruitful fields and gardens. It has contributed to that interchange between sea and land, by which the fertility of the soil is maintained. It brings the snow and the rain, and replenishes the great reservoirs from which Nature waters the earth. It pours also the warmth of the harvest-time over a hundred waiting lands. It mediates between sun and soil, making the insensate clod quick with strange promise. The wind is the motive-power in all the workshops of Nature, and if the motive-power were to fail, the machinery would stop, and this bustling hive of a planet become a silent tomb. The wind acts directly upon human destiny, even when no Exodus is in progress. For the sick man it may mean life or death, and in the letters to which the finger of the weather-vane before his window points, he may spell his own fate. It makes or mars the destiny of a country threatened with plague. Under its gigantic pinions it carries the very secrets of God. No wonder the ancients worshipped it, for they saw how vast was its power over human fortunes.

An argument lies hidden in this similitude of the wind, and the argument is from the less to the greater. He who bestows the lower gifts will not withhold the higher. Is the atmosphere which environs the earth pregnant with more sacred

mysteries than that which enwraps the spirit of man? If messengers await God's call mid-heaven, whose ministries replenish the lower creation with unfailing fruitfulness, surely He will not leave the higher creation to become an unvisited waste and a moral desolation. If there is perpetual renewal for the outer world, the forces of quickening and reconstruction cannot surely be shut out from that realm within us where God seeks to abide. Is the spiritual, which surpasses the material in its significance, cared for by a less wise and lavish bounty? If God sends His winds to brood over inferior kingdoms of life, and makes the earth to conceive and bring forth abundantly, surely in the more royal kingdom of the Spirit a Divine breath will steal to quicken the seeds of eternal life, and we shall not be given over to taint, stagnation, death. Nicodemus in his unbelief might have imagined that God restricts the forthputting of His power to Nature, and works wonders only in rare epochs of history, whilst He makes little of those interests which are in the forefront of His care. If the winds blow at His word, softening the hard earth with showers, painting flowers and sweetening fruits with the summer warmth, shall no benign changes come to the human soul, vitalising its aspirations and helping it to bring forth fruit unto God? The continuous reanimation of organic life in all its forms ought to rebuke our distrust of corresponding move-

ments in spiritual kingdoms. Shall God in mercy breathe His sweet winds upon the habitations of men, cleansing them from fever, plague, and death, and yet deny streams of purifying influence to those hidden shrines of affection which He has chosen for His temples? Assuming, as we inevitably must, that man has fallen, that he has an inbred unfitness for a perfect social life amongst his fellows, as well as for the high destiny of Divine communion put before him, that he has in himself the sentence of death, the marvel would be if a new birth was impossible. Can we conceive of a society in which the ailments of animals are cared for in hospitals, and men are left to die in the streets? The God who cares for the least will care for the greatest. He who ordains the ministries which tend to the renewal of life in this lower world, will also send forth into the souls of men One who shall raise them from the death of sin to the life of righteousness.

1. IN THIS MINIATURE PARABLE OF REGENERATION JESUS REMINDS US OF THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE SPIRIT, WHO QUICKENS MEN TO NEWNESS OF LIFE. "The wind bloweth where it listeth." The wind is, perhaps, less trammelled than any of the forces which work in the realm of Nature. The imagination instinctively clothes it with attributes of incomparable majesty. Water had just been spoken of as a similitude of the purifying change through which the children of the kingdom must needs pass; "except a man be born of water and

of the Spirit;" but water suggests only one aspect of the mystic power which works for the purification of human life. "He that believeth on Me, out of him shall there flow as it were rivers of living water." When John saw water and blood issuing from the spear-gash in the side of the Crucified, his memory, perhaps, went back to the Spirit typified by water. The figure emphasises the practical virtue rather than the personal sovereignty of the Spirit. To set forth the majestic, self-determining prerogative of this mystic messenger of life, the Great Teacher chooses the winds of heaven. The river clear, patient, resistless though it may be, is scarcely master of its own work and movement. Its course is determined by the natural features of the country through which it glides. It cannot fly on unseen wings or travel by the path of the lightning. It must creep down the valleys where the deep bed has been hollowed for its waters. The barrier of hills can force it to turn upon itself. To some extent it is under the control of man who can impede or hasten, divide or divert its currents. The water is servant rather than sovereign, although at times it may break out into terrible insurrection. By skill and toil it may be driven into the pathways where man wants it. It obeys his call when he sinks his artesian well, and irrigates the yellow stretches of the desert. Is it not otherwise with the wind, which is absolute master of its own career? Its flight cannot be guided by human hands. It is

too high to be shut in by mountain walls, too free to be chained to fore-determined tracks through the valleys. The kings of the earth cannot divert it from its chosen course. It mocks man as he seeks to steer against its currents, and when he rises a few feet from the ground he becomes its poor plaything. His keenest and most daring science cannot at present tame and bridle it. Of all the forces congregated in the treasuries of Nature it is least subject to human command and finite control. No Canute has been mad enough to defy it. It has the attribute of incomparable majesty.

And such is the absolute and self-determining sovereignty of the Spirit, who comes to accomplish the miraculous change which had staggered the faith of Nicodemus. To teach this lesson Jesus personified a dumb, insensate force, and described it as choosing its own pathway. He who is Divine enough to create new life in human souls is clothed with matchless majesty; and, whilst obeying no human mandate on the one side, recognises no impossibility or finite limitation on the other. This power from God, which makes for human regeneration, can overpass mountains and outleap all restraints imposed upon its action by our dim vision and our blundering unbelief. "It bloweth where it listeth." It is free to pass by for the time, if need be, a stereotyped, self-complacent rabbi like Nicodemus, and bring a flood of spiritual vitality into a callous, covetous

publican or an abandoned profligate. It may withdraw itself from the punctilious Jew, and focus its vitalising forces into the soul of a benighted Gentile. It belongs to the realm of the superhuman, and must not be judged by those earthly precedents to which Nicodemus attached undue significance. "It bloweth where it listeth."

And yet its sovereignty is not aloofness or inconstancy. The Spirit, like the wind, which is its emblem, makes for an equal distribution of the great gifts of heaven. It bows to woo the mean and to teach the depraved, as though it belonged to the common forces of the earth. It wanders into the lowest valleys, and yet it is the breath of an impartial love belonging to a higher sphere than the sun. Nicodemus and his school thought they were supreme arbiters in the sphere of religion upon earth, and that nothing could be done without their co-operation and approval. It was theirs to bind and to loose, theirs to mould and to colour the piety of the nation at large. But the force which achieves this miracle of the new life is from God, and by working, as it will, and upon whom it will, must assert its sovereignty. "It bloweth where it listeth." We cannot choose its methods or prescribe its times. And this is to teach us a reverent and implicit dependence upon His holy will. Counsels of reason and impartial love guide the movements of this sovereignty, and it is in no sense arbitrary though unfathomable. The winds are not fickle, although

we often think them so. They have their appointed zones, and, within a large cycle of their own, their effects are stable and unfailing. Rain-clouds are carried to and fro, the balm of spring is shed through field and forest, and the year crowned with blessing. The gifts of the Spirit are not finally denied to those who look for them, although we need to be sternly taught, it is not ours to command them at will. Those manifestations of peculiar power which sometimes appear in times of revival, and then seem to be withdrawn, are themselves parts of a large and self-consistent process which is making all things new.

2. THIS SPIRIT OF REGENERATION LENDS ITSELF WITHIN CERTAIN LIMITS TO THE TEST OF EXPERIENCE. Like the wind it asserts its presence by an unmistakable sign. "Thou hearest the sound thereof." The eye cannot directly trace its path through the air. It mocks our science. It has no rigid, predetermined courses, and may blow upon us from the north, the south, the east, or the west. Yet it gives a sign as it passes before us. "Thou hearest the sound thereof." We catch its murmur amongst the trees, and its quiet music surging through the rocking corn-stalks of the harvest field. We hear it moaning through the forest and splitting the straining boughs. We watch its effect far out at sea, as it whitens the wave-crests or sends the ship with swollen sails swishing through the trough of the deep. We can feel its touch upon the skin and know

at once the quarter from which it comes. But we should be rash if we were to guess over what cities it has rushed. We cannot get at it to determine its form or investigate the tales it could tell, if it would submit to be questioned. The subtle force attests its presence by the sign it stamps upon the face of Nature. We hear the voice thereof and know its message.

So with the movement of this life-giving Spirit in human souls. We see the tokens of its power, for they come within the range of our direct experience, although its comings and its goings are veiled in impenetrable dimness. A deepening sorrow for sin shows that He is brooding over the deeps of the soul. We see the inclinations disengaging themselves from earth and turning heavenwards. We hear the confession of sin from lips that have been sealed with pride. We recognise a strange and sudden desire for better things in those who were once of the earth, earthy We see a mourner comforted. A new power of spiritual discernment arises within those who were frivolous or sodden. We listen to the psalm of praise from forgiven and liberated captives. A home is transformed and softer voices speak within it. That is all. We should like to know a great deal more, but we cannot get far behind the facts. We should like to apply other tests. Is this the touch of God or a new problem in psychology? How does He act on finite minds? May a man indeed be born when he is old? What is the power which renews? But we

cannot advance, for a great mystery faces us and the only test is practical. "Thou hearest the sound thereof."

Ruskin has said that David Cox was the first painter to put the wind into his trees. He made men see the restless undulations of air in tossing branches, upturned leaves, and swaying masses of foliage. Before his time trees had been painted like the squat, stumpy caricatures of palms carved by the Nuremberg toy-maker for Noah's arks. We do not know what a forest or a corn-field is till we see it bowed in rhythmic grace before the unseen power that plays upon it. And no human life is rightly sketched for us unless we are allowed to see the Divine impulses which arise within it. Perhaps some day we shall have historians of sufficient insight to make us see the presence of the Spirit in the fret and the agitation of the centuries. Such pictures have sometimes been painted for us. We hear the goings forth of the Spirit in the brief story of Primitive Christianity, in the new creating whisper which came to Martin Luther as he climbed on his knees the holy stairs at Rome, in the revelation which visited Wesley and warmed his heart, whilst one read Luther's commentary on the Epistle to the Romans at Aldersgate Street, in appeals which have come with converting power to many in our own day. And such scenes are more common than the skill and the courage needed to paint them. With all our lugubrious realism in art and letters, I doubt whether we have

yet had a single picture of true conversion presented by a master-hand. It would be something to see the wind in the trees. In every lifetime the movement which announces this mystic presence comes again and again, and is, alas, sometimes forgotten. Churches shake themselves from the dust, acquire a new baptism of zeal, and are moved by strong spiritual passions, and in less than a generation those same churches lose their healthy flexibility, reverse the methods of their fathers, and show as little of the wind amongst their branches as fossil forests. The Spirit stirs up one generation to set itself towards moral and social reform, and the next generation becomes giddy, careless, pre-occupied, sunk in pride and stupefaction. But this power which makes for renewal appears again and again, and men, narrow as Nicodemus, who are unfit to hear of heavenly things, are sooner or later compelled to heed a still small voice which whispers in their hearts. Signs of a doctrine of the Spirit come within the limits of their narrow experience, and they are compelled to believe in an undefined power that makes for renewal. "Thou hearest the sound thereof."

3. THE MOVEMENTS OF THIS SPIRIT OF RE-GENERATION ARE UNSEARCHABLE. A veil of dense mystery is drawn about the steps of His visitations. "Thou canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth."

We are supposed to know far more about the origin and the progress of the winds than men knew when

this ruler of the Jews visited Jesus by night. We have our diagrams of cyclones, our theories of trade winds, our observatories, our figures of spiral movements in the air, our daily comparisons of barometer-readings cabled from two or three continents, our newspaper weather-charts, our forecasts. We speculate about the parts played by sun-spots and gulf-stream. But the laws determining the movements of the atmosphere lend themselves less readily to scientific handling and verification than the laws which have been formulated in other branches of physics. There is here, as elsewhere a large residuum of unexplained mystery. Do inequalities of temperature in the various zones of the earth account for everything? Must the earth's movement on its axis be brought into the reckoning? What is the relative share of each factor in determining the currents of the upper atmosphere? Is the generation of electricity a cause which must be considered? Much may have been added to the sum of our knowledge within the last fifty years, but it is far from complete; and the winds are as much a subject of mystery to us as to the ancients, who thought they were imprisoned in caves and let out at the discretion of one of the gods. The Lord's similitude is valid still, and the incoming and the outgoing of the Spirit baffle our comprehension.

If Nicodemus could only be persuaded to accept heartily the limited truth which came within the

range of his experience, something would be gained. He could scarcely be expected to know that the Spirit of miraculous virtue was to be sent by Jesus from the Father, nor to appreciate the work the free Spirit was yet to accomplish in the entire race of man. At the Pentecost, John knew more about the person and office of the Spirit than at the time of this conversation, and yet even then the science of its methods baffled the keenest understanding. This mediator of a new spiritual creation rose up out of infinite and eternal depths, and no mind could fathom His beginnings. The Spirit, moreover, was bestowed by Him whom Nicodemus addressed as "Rabbi," and most wonderful of all was sent to interpret that cross upon which the Son of Man was soon to be uplifted. No mortal could tell the truths with whose revelation he was charged, and the goal towards which he was moving. Starting-point and resting-place were alike hidden in impenetrable secrecy.

The whence and the whither of His work amongst men is no less beyond human power to trace. When does the Spirit first begin to work in the heart of a child? Whither is He directing the man who receives His renewing virtues? Towards what activities does He lead forth those who surrender themselves to His sovereign will? For what after-destiny is He making ready those into whose souls He comes? To answer such questions would be to empty eternity, past and to be, of those unutterable

things which God has kept back from us. Mystery invests the methods and the issues of His sacred work. "Thou canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth."

Men who are at the opposite theological poles are in equal danger of forgetting that the Spirit's renewing work is inscrutable both in its beginnings and in its illimitable outlook. The priest professes to find at the baptismal font the landmark of an initial change. When the sign of the cross has been made upon the child, and he is baptized in the name of the Triune God, the child becomes at once a new creature. The practical difficulties of such a doctrine, however, are enormous. As Bishop Walsham How points out, children so received into Christ's Church in many cases give no sign of the new life for years, and, perhaps, not to the end of their days; whilst children not baptized have hearts open to Divine influence and leading. When pressed with this fact, the sacerdotalist falls back upon the theory that in the moment of baptism the seed of a new life is infixed within the child, but the seed may be latent for years. Such organic analogies mislead us, for the Spirit Himself immediately creates the new life and does not minister it through a seed, the properties of which may be latent for half a century. Jesus Christ did not work miracles of healing, the effects of which only appeared twenty or thirty years after. Such a profession would have covered Him with ridicule. To speak of a regenerative work, the effect of which becomes

apparent after a long interval, is a species of sacramental predestination, scarcely different from the idea of an unconditional election from the foundation of the world. It is not for us to speak of a new life from above till its signs appear in the temper and life. The Spirit anticipates the first dawn of consciousness in the child, and it is profane and untrue to make a sacrament the boundary-line of His advent into a human life.

The evangelist and the mission preacher, who represent a different theology, sometimes fall into a similar error. They speak as if the real work of the Spirit began with their appeals. They trace the inward processes of conversion, and announce its specific stages with as much authority as though they were the overseers and time-keepers of these sacred mysteries. They announce the number of conversions said to have taken place at a single service or in a ten-days' mission, and speak of inquirers upon whom the Spirit of God is moving as though they were finally saved. Their insight into the times and ways of the Spirit in the human heart is as detailed and as dogmatic as that of the bee-keeper who has watched the habits and activities of bees under a glass hive. They profess to know whence the Spirit comes into a human soul, and whither He goes. The work of the Spirit when it emerges into the living experience of the renewed man, is, of course, unmistakable; but we are in danger of forgetting that its methods are inscrutable. We must be assured of His presence

when He gives no outward token; for He never withdraws Himself from the world. Sometimes He may be working in that part of our life of which we are scarcely conscious, for, perchance, He finds a free field for His ministries in the subliminal self. But the times, methods, and appointed order of His work can no more be explored and investigated than can the cradle and the grave of the winds in their courses. "Thou canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth."

In his poem of the "Ancient Mariner," Coleridge has pictured a world from which the winds have passed away. No clouds drifted by with their kindly tempering veils. The ship was motionless as a rock in the stagnant waters. The sea burnt green and red as though coated with oils from a witch's cauldron. The sailors dropped down dead upon the deck, and sea-snakes crawled over the surface of the rotting deep. Such a scene of terror and death agonises the sensitive imagination. The world from which the movements of the Spirit, the life-giving wind of God dies out is more terrible than this. No benign breath stirs through its weird immensities to dispel the paralysing despair. Into such a world none of us have yet entered, nor through the grace of God ever shall. The four winds of God are still awaiting the call of the prophets, and come forth to sweeten and reanimate our corrupt and sinful life. The Spirit, like the wind, may breathe softly as the zephyr or rush with the power of the tornado; but come He must, or

there can be no kingdom of God amongst men, and His coming is life.

Look to Jesus Christ, the Giver of this Spirit of renewal and quickening power. Approach Him with a more daring and heroic faith than Nicodemus when he timidly called Him "Rabbi." With what fresh discernments, with what gifts for ennobled service would he have gone back to his home if he had only prayed "Give me this Spirit of renewal; I ask not to trace its whence or its whither; but let me feel its vital fire in my soul." The Spirit is in the keeping of Him who gave His blood for our ransom, and it is against His nature to refuse a gift or to bestow it with a sparing hand. He ministers it from the Father and according to the law of a Father's surpassing bounty. Holding the winds in His fists and making the waves obedient to His word, He has equal control over the vital and mystic tides which refresh and purify the spiritual universe. "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, and they shall live."

XIII.

STEPS TO A DIVINE GOAL.

"Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises ; that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."—2 PETER i. 4.

THE right interpretation of man is the key to every kind of progress, both in this life and that which is to come. We cannot put a piece of machinery to its appointed uses and get out of it the best results it was intended to yield, unless we grasp the idea which was in the mind of its constructor. It is impossible for a stranger to understand its capabilities by looking at the building in which it is placed, or surveying the platform on which it is mounted. It must be studied from within. Man and his destiny cannot be adequately explained by a science of the wonderful world in which he has been placed, or an exhaustive description of the complex framework in which his mysterious life enshrines itself. Peter here tells us that the end of the inspired religion and its assurances is to bring men into community with the Divine nature, which,

of course, implies a high conception of the Divine character as a starting-point. Some religions have a majestic object of worship and a specific belief in a future life, but do not conceive of man as created for a much higher goal than he has already reached, and they do not, therefore, claim to put him into the pathway of a Divine ascent. The gods are sometimes gigantic men of like passions with themselves, and the future life is assumed to reproduce the characteristic features of this. When the imagination constructs great cycles of time it fills them with a movement that comes back again to the beginning. In the early stages of Nature-worship the rising and setting of the daily sun, the processes of growth and decay in the year, supplied man's thought with its analogies, and human destiny was pictured under the image of these successive changes. Many thinkers came to believe in endless mutations without an infinite advance. The noblest and most widespread of all non-Christian religions sets itself to benumb, by meditation, the keenness of the conscious faculties, if not, indeed, to extinguish them. The course of human history is reduced to an ever-repeating round, ending for the blessed in a dreamless sleep. Man, according to the nobler view, was not created and inspired to be the instrument of a cosmic process only, but to attain by all that he does and endures deathless honour and satisfaction, "to be a partaker of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world

through lust." Herein is the key to all material and spiritual progress.

1. PETER REMINDS US OF THE END TO BE ACHIEVED BY THOSE MANIFOLD ASSURANCES TO WHICH THE DIVINE FIDELITY IS PLEDGED. "That through these ye may become partakers of the Divine nature." The terms in which this lofty goal is put before us seem to savour of the rhapsody of the Pantheist rather than of the severe reverence of the Jew. The Jew had been taught to see an impassable disparity between God and His worshipper, and as he stood on the dim brink of the chasm he could only tremble and adore. To this writer, however, had come a new disclosure of the depths of Divine condescension in Jesus Christ illuminating a pathway across the chasm, so that the finite could find its affinity with the infinite, and realise therein all the tenderness of a family communion. Half a century ago he began to see that the Divine nature was ever conveying itself to an only begotten Son; and now he finds that through the ministry of that Son others may partake of His nature in some lowly but wonderful degree. Perhaps in Rome and in other places he had become familiar with the old mythologies, and saw taking place around him the process of god-making by imperial rescript. From such vain-glorious profanities he would turn with loathing and pain. But he recognises that human nature may be lifted up beyond all dreams. It may become Divine by

the gift of Him who is the one only God; and the new life in which man arises to his highest destiny, is that life of faith through which God imparts Himself to those who trust the great and precious promises.

What a profound and original conception is this that God has expressly given to His people—promises through which they may reach a vital participation in His own sacred and glorious nature. The Oriental mystic had been accustomed to teach that man was part and parcel of a universal God, and however sincere and devoted the mystic himself might be, the dogma exalted man at the cost of degrading God. It made the animal, the human, and the superhuman, good, bad, and indifferent alike, the functions of a Supreme Existence. It allowed man to partake in the Divine nature by abasing God to the human level, rather than by lifting up sanctified men into organic union with God. The ethnic religions taught that God pitied mortals sometimes, but they did not conceive that a hand was stretched down from the heights to lift the sons of earth, by an act of condescending love, into participation with the Divine qualities. In his study of the Homeric literature Gladstone says, "None of the five great gods of the poem are ever said to enter into the spirit of a man. They inspire a temper, but do not impart themselves." The life of Olympus had its caste-barriers, and the lesser must sometimes have fretted themselves in the service of the

greater gods. More or less of strife and jealousy entered into this superfine circle, and the strife and wrong-doing of mortals was contemplated with all the light-heartedness of a playgoing crowd. When in the later mythologies we see the hero reaching his apotheosis, he seems to have compelled it, although perhaps he may have had his partisans amongst the gods. He passes to Olympus by sheer force of personal valour or heroism, and that exalted circle is never described in either Greek or Roman literature as eager to help others up to its beatitudes.

And no wonder that such a view should have been taken, for it was in harmony with the sad analogies of human life and character. What reason had Greek or Roman to think that the gods were anxious to make others share in their majesty and placid blessedness? If rivalry was the law of mortals why not of the immortals also? The divinities had their infirmities, and were accustomed to abet and foment the selfish struggles of the world beneath them. The vicissitudes and successive stages of man's ethical development were reflected in these interwoven myths, which had this common note.

In all human society there is an unhappy tendency to exclusiveness and self-absorption. Men want to save up for themselves and their children the best fruit of their thought and toil, to establish monopolies, to fence off their privileges from common use. The end of human law is to prevent the dis-

persion of the benefits which certain groups of men have made their own; whilst the end of all Divine law is to diffuse the gladness, the honour, and the power which once belonged to God alone. God's mind sets itself towards free, far-spreading self-communication, and to those who are high in the scale of created being He gives endowments which fit them to take part in doing that which it was once God's solitary prerogative to do. What a mirror of man's moral littleness we may see in the expedients he adopts to conserve his worldly gains! He sometimes dreads the impartial distribution of his substance even amongst his own children. He calls the land upon which he has laid the grip of possession after his own name, and recoils from the idea of subdividing it even for the coming generations. Honours must not be made common, and new lists of coronation and birthday honours are perused by the man who represents an older title with an unconfessed feeling of disfavour and ill-will.

The deeper truths of some religions have been kept from all but a select few. The Egyptian hieroglyph was once the special secret of priests. It is not many years since it was a capital offence for a Chinaman, a Parsee, or a Brahman, to teach his literature to the stranger. And men are still more jealous of admitting aliens to a share in the qualities of their birth and blood than to partnership in the lore of their books or the gains of their trade. The

pride of race is fiercer and more imperious than that of possessions. We see it in the high castes of India, as well as in some of the royal houses of Europe. There must be no family alliances outside the clan, and the despotic tradition had its beginning in the fear lest the instincts and the aptitudes of the blood, and the royal or priestly prerogatives which run in the blood, should pass by descent to outsiders. The caste must keep itself unmixed, if it is to maintain its pre-eminence. Men are tenacious of their properties, angry at the thought of sharing their honours and emoluments, fanatical in upholding the worth and dignity of the peculiar blood flowing in the veins of the clan with which they are incorporated. To some extent, perhaps, all this is both natural and necessary, for it prevents degeneracy; but the tradition represents a tendency towards an isolated and self-regarding egoism, rather than towards a catholic diffusion amongst others of the best things which are in us and our race.

What a sublime contrast to our mean, grudging exclusiveness is presented in the free, illimitable expansiveness of God's self-communicating love. There are no blessings He seeks to reserve for His own use alone. He does not wish to establish an endless monopoly even in the qualities of His own ineffable character. It would have been no small thing had He promised to make us free of His palace, or to enrich us with the uncomputed gifts of His unknown treasuries, or to open our vision to

some of the marvels over which His own mighty vision ranges. What a gracious mark of friendship, if He had only unfolded to us the sealed book of His wisdom, making us, in a degree proportionate to our capacity, the confidants of His own deep, transcendent judgments! What a privilege had He called us to be listeners to some strains of the universal music which is always filling His ear! The honour would have been indescribably beyond our desert, if He had promised that the waiting angels of His own presence should be ministers attending our footsteps who are destined heirs of salvation! But His purposes go far beyond this. Through the promises, great and precious in their magnificent contents and inspirations, He seeks to make us partakers of His own lofty and blessed nature.

He wishes us, not only to love after the pattern of His love, to set before ourselves the same objects and the same pursuits, to yearn with affections like His own, to share in the glory of His mighty acts; but to possess an interblended life, to feel His vitality uniting itself to our central consciousness, to be organic channels which hold the movements of His nature just as in the tissues and vessels of the child the royal life of the house to which he belongs is surging. This means far more than having His image imprinted upon us and becoming imitators of His character. It suggests that the affections and the motive-forces of the Godhead must flow through us, just as the tides of the ocean project themselves

into every whorl of the pink sea-shell, and throb through the chambers of the coral, and the cells of the growing sponge. God's nature abhors isolation, for isolation is selfishness, and by the force of an eternal love He seeks to communicate Himself. This was the one end, only half-aware of itself, which gave primitive man his religion, asserting itself also in the pilgrim marches of Abraham, directing the statesmanship of Moses, and becoming articulate in the work and testimony of the prophets till now. Apart from this purpose, there would have been no revelation. "That we might be partakers of the Divine nature." Life is unmeaning and distasteful without some such goal. Men into whose programme of work religion scarcely enters feel this. In a letter addressed to John Morley, the late Professor Huxley writes: "It is a curious thing that I find my dislike to the thought of extinction increasing as I get older and nearer the goal. . . . It flashes across me at all sorts of times, with a sort of horror, that in 1900 I shall probably know no more of what is going on than I did in 1800. I had sooner be in hell a good deal—at any rate in one of the upper circles. I wonder if you are plagued in this way." St Peter's theory of human destiny is the only line along which satisfaction can be found. A temporary progress in the acquisition of knowledge fated to final arrest cannot satisfy man as we find him. It is only by coming to share in the Divine nature that he can be made to feel he has lived not in vain.

In the different parts of this Divine purpose there is a propriety and an ordered succession. God-like qualities of character must be put into the forefront of any attempt to interpret Peter's daring phrase; and these will in due time be followed by possession in some grand though finite degree of the wisdom, power, and majesty we ascribe to God. Men often want to participate in God's natural attributes, whilst they are indifferent to the spell of His moral attributes. They are more eager to follow after occultism than holiness. Like Simon the Magician they aspire after Divine power, but have little or no hunger after the God-like character. They desire knowledge so that they may surpass other thinkers, and sit as gods amongst their fellows. They desire domain so that they may shine as men of affairs and captivate the homage of their contemporaries. They would like to be clothed with attributes constraining the worship of the multitudes, to sit on high thrones and wear crowns of distinction, to be irresistible; but like Lucifer and the first transgressors in the garden they begin at the wrong end of the problem. We must first of all share those moral qualities, which it is the prerogative of the creature to possess and cultivate, and then we shall come at length to enter into some of those powers which are more rarely conveyed, and even then can only be conveyed in part. In making us partakers of the vital qualities of His character God admits us to the secret of His own blessedness, and the extraordinary endowments which impress

the imagination of the world rank second in time, and, perhaps, also in importance.

It is this communication of the Divine life into our lives which makes possible the fulfilment of the other promises of the word. If the disciples grow like the Son who has been glorified with the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, if they share His dominion by being put in trust over kingdoms, if having overcome they sit upon thrones and eat with Him at His table even as He overcame and sat down on His Father's throne, if they appear as crowned princes at His side, it is because they have been made partakers of the Divine nature. Such promises become sober and rational only in virtue of this foundation promise. Unless we share those properties in the Divine nature with which our own best natures have affinity, God cannot put into us the spirit of His wisdom and power. The writer of this epistle learned on the Mount of the Transfiguration that he could not share the glory of his Master by building a tabernacle and living in contact with its illuminations. Participation in Divine life-tides must come to him through proof of the Divine fidelity in the valleys of a pain-riven and sin-smitten world.

2. THE APOSTLE SPECIFIES A CONDITION WHICH LIES UPON THE THRESHOLD OF THIS GREAT ASCENT. "Having escaped the corruption which is in the world through lust." Participation in a Divine life and attachment to an evil world cannot be coincident,

and the one state necessarily excludes the other. The temper of the world is hostile to our highest spiritual capacities, because it is there that the lower impulses of the nature rule and run riot. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life diffuse their sinister poisons till the world becomes little better than a scheduled plague-area, as inhospitable to God-like developments of character as the camping ground of a decimated army is alien to the ruddy health and mental alertness of little children. Nothing can be alleged against the world itself, but its atmosphere has been made pestilential by the corrupting lusts which have been at work through the dismal centuries. This confederacy of lust and pride has, alas! obscured and defaced the likeness in which man was made, and Jesus Himself needed to overthrow its dominion in the world before He could be glorified. His mission as the Incarnate Saviour was to reunite men to God, and He could only do this by detaching them from the world. Participation in the Divine nature must follow escape from the corruptions which are in the world through lust.

A child of noble ancestry, with every kind of promise folded up in his ungrown life, would not be likely to honour the high blood which runs in his veins if stranded in a fever swamp and ministered to for years by degraded pigmy slaves. If he is to grow into Greek perfection of feature and form, and develop the refined tastes and intellectual keenness of his house, he must be taken away to the salubrious

hills, where the devastating fever is kept at bay, and surrounded there by refining influences and helped by competent instructors. There will be arrested development, and perhaps hideous degeneration, unless his latent qualities get the chance of a new atmosphere. And so the Divine qualities within us can only be drawn out when we find escape from the debilitating and degrading influences of a corrupt environment. Those who are to be joint-heirs together with Christ cannot be taken out of the world, but they must be surrounded by new conditions, if they are to be all that God has so wonderfully planned. The spirit must escape from the coarsening and down-pressing associations of a lust-corrupted world, and brought into a new home.

A dainty tropical orchid could not justify the description given of its beauties, if it were put into a patch of ground rotten with potato blight, or left in the company of plants ravaged by green-fly. It must be introduced into a clean soil, and have a suitable temperature provided for it, and then the glory of its delicate markings and quaint intricacy of form will show that it has been worth its price. A rare, half-animate bloom cannot rough it like the thistle or the bind-weed, and grow in the teeth of fumes from a chemical works. If all the splendours of the Divine life are to appear in us, the glories of which we are assured in the great and precious promises, there must be an escape from the world and its baneful influences; and new conditions will have to

be established, in which our spiritual capabilities can unfold themselves, without taint of defilement or canker of death.

Escape from the corruption that is in the world through lust is the bigger half of the problem which confronts us in our upward progress. The Divine affinities within us will assert themselves when we find our way into this higher atmosphere. It is often the base environment to which we are holding on which arrests the best that is in us, and thwarts the due expression of all the virtues conveyed to us from the life of God. The steps by which we rise into the great destiny set before us are indicated by St Paul in his second epistle to the Corinthians. "Come ye out from among them and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing. And I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord God Almighty." God cannot unveil to us the glory of His loving Fatherhood, nor can we prove the high dignity of our sonship, in the base and unworthy associations which sometimes detain us. The sensibilities which make for a descent rather than for a magnificent ascent are stimulated by the world, and the inferior interests which root themselves in it. If we hold fast to the allurements of an unregenerate society, a fatal blight will be sure to fall on the greatness of our promise. The discipline of detachment from the world had to precede the moral exaltation and high blessedness of Abraham, Noah, Moses, Paul, and those whom

Jesus called from their boats and customs depôts. We are not sin-proof angels, and we may allow ourselves to be so saturated in the tempers and traditions of the world, that our most sacred capabilities will be profaned, and the foregleams of Divine greatness in us eclipsed. "Having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

3. ST PETER REMINDS US OF THE PART PLAYED BY THESE INSPIRED PROMISES IN UPLIFTING HUMAN CHARACTER AND DESTINY. Through these assurances the believer is ennobled into abiding union with God. The promises are described as "great and precious," because they contemplate ends of startling vastness, and bring men, through the faith of which they are the warrant, to priceless honour and blessedness. They are precious as the blood in which the redemptive covenant is founded, precious as the priceless faith they create in meek and contrite hearts.

The opening preposition of the text links the promises referred to with Divine attributes, making these attributes the ultimate groundwork of our confidence. In the Revised Version the last clause of the preceding verse reads, "through the knowledge of Him that called us by His own glory and virtue." And in the view of this writer, the promises issue from the glory and virtue of the Divine character. Human promises are not infrequently the offspring of weakness, and are the last resort of the man brought to bay, who has nothing better to offer.

How often are engagements undertaken in a temper of recklessness, or put forward to cover empty expectations. We say they are not worth the breath with which they are spoken, or the paper upon which they are written. But the promises given to us through "the glory and virtue" of the Godhead may well command our confidence, and inspire us with a sober and sacred optimism.

We should like to know what special promises Peter had in view when he used these glowing terms. His mind ranged over the entire field of Holy Scripture, and he looked upon the believer as the rightful heir of every assurance vouchsafed in the name of the Most High, to patriarch, lawgiver, and prophet; whilst the promises which came from the lips of His Master, he doubtless looked upon as the heart of all the rest. Each promise has its place, and at some time or other meets an urgent need of the Christian life, or supplies a timely encouragement. But if we are to interpret his words by the special purpose to which these promises link themselves in his thought, we must put special emphasis upon three groups of promises: (1) There are the promises which are the distinctive glory of the New Covenant, assuring us of the purification of the soul and all its outgoings from sin, and the re-establishment of our forfeited sonship to God, that inwriting of the law which makes it the vital substance of the character. (2) The presence of an indwelling Christ in the hearts of all loving and obedient disciples. (3) And also the

promise of the Spirit, which was the text of Peter's opening address on the day of Pentecost—the Spirit who puts within men the impulses of a Divine life, and teaches them steadfast and effectual sanctification to God. In this last promise all the sacred pledges of the past are gathered into one, just as all gifts were bestowed in the unspeakable gift of the Son. Where the Spirit guides, the door of access into the Divine presence-chamber is opened wide; and when the door is entered, the processes which make men God-like are irresistible. Men cannot stand within that door and remain aliens from the Divine life. Where the Spirit comes, not as the phenomenon of a moment, but as a lifelong Presence, the inward and the outward man are so hallowed that the life of Jesus has free course within the soul; and God not only enshrines Himself within human life, but makes Himself a part of its functions.

Perhaps Peter had also in mind the promises which assure God's people not only of the grace which sanctifies, but of the providence which watches over their common interests. Not only do these promises of the Divine care and guardianship minister solace in the day of distress, but they help the believer in his escape from the evil world, which is the first step towards this high goal and enable him to recognise his own dignity as a destined partaker of the Divine nature. No trial can demean the man for whom God always cares, and whose steps are attended by an unsleeping and ever active guardianship.

In what way do the promises of God bring to fulfilment the great purpose of which Peter speaks? These promises have a vital relation to the more mature exercises of faith, and when faith responds to all the challenges of God's covenant, the heart is purified and brought into conscious, transforming union with the Divine Father. The Spirit, apart from the written word, may draw men into a groping confidence in the justice and good-will of God, but the faith that has anchored itself to authoritative promises is specific in character and capable of more impressive achievements. Faith is focussed into strength and clearness by the express promises of the Scriptures. The vague confidence of a deaf and dumb child may be won by the gestures and the benign countenance of a stranger, but such confidence is widely different from that which is conveyed by those of his own kin, who can communicate their ideas and assure him of the plans which will temper the misfortunes of his lot and make ready for him in after years a prosperous career. A vague faith in the Divine character may do something towards freeing the soul from a sense of fear and condemnation; but it is when faith takes hold of the specific covenant promises, and so gathers knowledge and boldness that it reaches the meridian of its strength, and becomes the mighty mainspring of those processes through which God assimilates our mean, selfish, ignoble natures to His holy and glorious nature.

Has God thus spoken to men, and may past revelations of His gracious counsels be accepted as a message to us? Do the sacred Scriptures contain words which God acknowledges as binding Him to certain courses of action in His dealings with those who call themselves His people? Devout men sometimes question whether, considering the vicissitudes of ancient manuscripts, the translations and the successive editings to which they have been subjected, the adaptations of language made in good faith to different generations and races of readers, we can be sure that we have the very words of the Lord Jesus Himself, not to speak of His apostles. Are these supposed promises of any more validity at the present hour than the property covenants found on a clay cylinder from the ruins of Babylon, the parties to which died three or four thousand years ago? Such doubts ignore two or three facts. The great and precious promises are perpetuated in the symbols of sacraments as well as in the script of papyrus and parchment. God is not an unwilling party to a covenant, who needs to be bound by a fastidious interpretation of the mere letter of His word. His word is living because it is mediated by His own deathless attributes. The glory and virtue of God are in His promises, and they are immortal. And the promises are verified in the daily experience of the Church, and have been so verified for unbroken centuries. They are made valid to us by the honour God never ceases to put upon them, as well as by

their original inspiration. They represent a sure, urgent, deathless purpose in God, "that we should be made partakers of the Divine nature"; and if the purpose cannot be broken off, no more can the promises by which that purpose fulfils itself. If the promises had failed or become obsolete through errors of transmission, Christianity would have been the most pessimistic religion upon the face of the earth. But it is the most hopeful. Other religions are depressing in proportion to the loftiness of their precepts. The promises have always proved themselves just as authentic as those high obligations which never fail to assert themselves, within the Christian conscience. Faith is a response to the challenge of God's promises, and it brings men into a mysterious and blessed union with the Divine nature.

XIV.

BENIGN SHADOWS.

"The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning: but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth."—ECCLESIASTES vii. 4.

IN every assembly of worshippers the house of mourning and the house of mirth are both represented; those from the one asking to be comforted, and those from the other needing to be sobered by an enforcement of the true view of life. Those who have come from scenes of recreation and exciting pleasure must be warned, not indeed against getting the most out of life, but against getting the least out of it by undue devotion to inferior forms of self-gratification. Young men and women upon whom family and business responsibilities have scarcely begun to press are tempted to take up with the idea that life may be a long, smiling, good-natured jubilation. And mourners have to be reminded that their discipline has an illuminated side to it, and that they may come with more solid and enduring gains from scenes of distress and tears, than those attain who come from scenes of mirth and junketing. The sorrows of men do more for

the improvement of the character and the brightening and betterment of the after-life than its hilarities. We perhaps do not care to detain our minds upon the lessons that meet us as we pass into the house of mourning, and it is no part of the preacher's work to foster morbid forebodings in the young, or to set up for imitation sombre, rigid-featured, funereal types of piety; but we must face the many-sided facts of life, bravely equip ourselves for all coming changes and chances, and by searching for the great truths which lie under the deepest shadows, make sure that we shall get commensurate moral compensations from our sorrows, when the day of pain and desolation lowers over us. The shrine of the highest wisdom is often a house in the valley of shadows; but the chambers of laughter and vapid merry-making are forcing-beds of folly and selfishness. Whilst the patriarch Job had still to learn great and priceless lessons in the school of suffering, he was alive to the perils and pitfalls in the house of mirth, for he offered on behalf of his convivial children continual sacrifices which expressed his devout parental solicitude.

Curiously constituted persons are sometimes met with who feel, or pretend to feel, an unhealthy preference for the more depressing side of human life. They gloat over the ghastliness of disease, the terror of abnormal calamity, the wild ravages of death, the indecorous secrets of the charnel house, and cultivate the airs, tones, and facial expressions of professional

weepers as some people take up with brand-new slang or the latest fashion in accents. That they are any the better for these lugubrious airs may be doubted, for there is just as much hypocrisy in the parade of cheap sentiment as in the profession of religion. Accepted teachers of the great truths of the spiritual life sometimes encourage these mawkish tendencies. To rebuke the tastes and appetites of the flesh members of religious orders have observed the practice of putting ashes into their soup. Good Thomas à Kempis recommends his readers to keep down personal pride by remembering that their bodies will one day be food for worms. Such counsels are unhealthy, alien to all sane and wholesome life, and fitting to the draggled faith that never lifts up its head in assurance of victory. Our world is thick-set with pain, abasement, and marks of mortality, not, however, to give us an opportunity of crawling on hands and knees amongst such repulsive things, but to challenge us to the cheerful, rejoicing confidence by which they are vanquished and set at nought. But if there is one thing more inanely irrelevant to our life than morbid piety, it is the frenzied frivolity of those who treat the world as if it were a huge, ever-open music hall, and are at last surprised in their romping recklessness by the tragedies of disease and unwelcome death. We cannot keep out by a jest the vast distresses which will sooner or later invade the circle of our life. It is only a Dutch courage men show when they make

death and its incidents the staple of their trite quips and comedies. Those best maintain a temper of consistent, cheerful, and unfailing fortitude who, whilst never going a step ahead to meet trouble, yet equip themselves for all chances by a strong undespairing confidence in God, and a just interpretation of the fact and significance of human sorrow.

The house of mourning is often vibrant with distressing memories of pain, and amidst its scenes the temptation to doubt God and to rebel against His ways is singularly powerful. It sometimes makes atheists but more often saints of a singularly fine and attractive order. In all ages pain has been looked upon as furnishing ground for a damaging impeachment of the Divine goodness. If we can see God through the sackcloth-veils which hide Him from us here we shall find it easy to see Him everywhere. To say that the sum total of pleasure in the world exceeds that of pain is no sufficient answer to our doubts. The late Professor Huxley, in a striking letter to a correspondent says: "If our ears were sharp enough to hear all the cries of pain which are uttered in the earth by men and beasts we should be deafened by one continuous scream. And yet the wealth of superfluous loveliness in the world condemns pessimism." Perhaps the great biologist did not intend that to be an adequate answer and may have looked upon the problem as insoluble. But the answer might have been carried a step further. To say that houses of mirth outnumbered the houses of mourning, and that

fine equipages sweeping through the streets are ten to one as compared with funeral cabs, is an answer fitted only to a selfish mind. Science is now showing us the important place that pain has in Nature's therapeutics. Not only does it warn of danger, but it acts the part of the splint and compels us to give rest to the limb or organ of the body where mischief has set in. A great surgeon, whose name is in everybody's mouth, recently asserted that a dire disease of which much has been heard in recent years is Nature's protection against worse and fatal forms of trouble. But we are ready to say: "The mystery is that pain should continue when recovery is impossible. We could look with more composure upon the convulsive distresses of our loved ones if these grim forces were always a condition of recovered life. The torture seems to be gratuitous. It is akin to the regime of cruelty under which the criminals of the East are sometimes put to death. Why does Nature play with those whose interests are so sacred to us as the wild beast plays with its victim?" If the underlying motive of pain is recuperative, why should you blame Nature for doing its best to the last more than you would blame nurse or doctor? Perhaps its healing good-will must be vindicated.

No serious thinker, however, would assume that the enigma can be explained from the purely physical side. *Pain has a social and a spiritual purpose to fulfil as well as a mission to restore the body where it is still possible.* When the hope of returning strength

has gone and pain has no function left to it either as a sentinel or a physician, it tarries to fulfil a spiritual evangel the mystery and significance of which we only know in part. For such creatures as we are, crude, unabashed, self-seeking pleasure lovers, till the disciplines of life have improved us a little, a world without pain would be the worst of all possible schools. The finer chords of music, poetry, pathos, love, gratitude and sympathy would remain mute within us. Pride, frivolity, and egoism would be dominant, and if we did not become tormentors of our kith and kin it would be for lack of opportunity in an insensate and impassive world. Pain sometimes seems to be the only channel through which the love of God can pour itself into men and fuse them into families and gracious kindreds. A keen critic of men and things, no friend to religious faith, once said, "It is only the suffering man who is truly human. Every limb has its history of pain. They are all besouled. I even believe that through the agony of suffering dumb animals may become human, for once I saw a dying dog that gazed at me in its death struggle with quite a human face." If pain can humanise a dog to what moral heights may it not raise a man? We cannot sound the mystery of suffering or find out the benign secrets hidden under its shadows whilst we look at it through the eyes of the utilitarian, pure and simple. Human nature borrows new dignity and moral value from pain.

Springs of loving-kindness break forth and flow

through the house of affliction, which yield not a few gracious compensations to the sufferer. The appeal of pain is often resistless in its persuasiveness, and draws forth unknown reserves of sympathy and helpfulness. Graces shine in the eclipse of the sick-room and the darkened chamber of death that were obscured before. If there were no tormenting diseases, no beds of weariness, no houses of mourning, our world would be poorer in refined tenderness, in humane emotion, in warm fellowships of soul, and our nature, perhaps, would never show its best side. Men with reputations for frigidity and reserve, begin to disclose an exquisite sensitiveness. If drink from the house of feasting is kept outside, rough men will care for each other in sickness with the gentleness of women, moving to and fro with footsteps of fairy lightness. It is said that the inmates of French and Russian convict prisons make the most pitiful and attentive of nurses. In the Pagan East beggars may be seen caring for the more infirm members of their wretched communities with exemplary thoughtfulness and delicacy. We are told that the sapphires and topazes, and perhaps the diamonds hidden away in the veins of the rocks and amongst the gravels of the water-courses, were formed in fires of primeval intenseness. The choicest graces of the human race are often created amidst the hot alchemies and the consuming pains of the sick-chamber. Priceless transmutations take place in the scalding

rain of tears that sweeps down in desolated homes. The brightest links in the golden chain of friendship have been forged in the furnace of great affliction. The house of mourning is a nobler school than the house of feasting, and adds more to the one part of our nature which will live. Many a reconciliation begins in the hushed and soul-softening atmosphere which encircles scenes of suffering and death. Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, forget old feuds as they meet in the presence of death. True, the house of mourning is not always a place of reconciliation and a shrine of charity; but this exception often occurs when those who enter it for a time come from the house of mirth, and wish to get back thither as fast as possible with their legacies.

Lessons of humility imprint themselves upon the character in the house of mourning which fail to emerge in scenes of mirth. The house of feasting and riotous laughter is often a citadel of pride. The guests go there in fulness of health and abounding prosperity, and strengthen each other's hands in aggressiveness and self-assertion. They pose as invincible demi-gods whose power is secure against decay. Men must turn elsewhere if they wish to be schooled into humility and resignation. Those who come from the house of mourning are, as a rule, humbler than those who avoid its threshold, although pride sometimes asserts itself again as the chastened memories fade, and the hold on life is recovered. In weakness and affliction the sinew in the stiff-neck is often broken,

and he who was once so robust and independent becomes beholden to others, in ways he would have resented in the heyday of his health. The man who is brought within measurable distance of the grave has a sense of dependence upon the kindness of others he has never felt since the days of his childhood, and he frankly admits it. His, for the time being, is a maimed life, and he must bow himself to trust in the hands and feet of those who are about him. Power, in which he once exulted, passes to others. He asks a favour where a few weeks ago he would have given an order. All the relations of the home are inverted, and things are upside down. The servant becomes a master on whose word the latter must needs wait, and the child exacts obedience from the parent to whom he has been submitting himself for years. And all who enter the home and become familiar with the pathos of its story, seem to share in the common humiliation and feel the falseness of pride. Vanity and self-exaltation are no longer possible. We are in presence of the inevitable, and it will one day assert itself over us, and dispel our most imperious moods. Sooner or later we shall find ourselves compelled to be meek, unresisting, submissive, and the more promptly we learn our lesson the better. The great levelling will come. Men are proud, insular, self-sufficient enough as it is, and to restrain their vaunting ambitions is no easy task; but if the world had in it no houses of mourning with their

admonitory lessons, rampant pride would make it so insufferable that it would cease to be a habitable part of the universe.

The better feelings called forth by suffering, which link men to each other, prepare the mind for those spiritualised affections which are uniting bonds with the Eternal God. The heart chastened into meekness by pain and solaced by human sympathy presents rich soil for the growth of a tenacious contrite trust in God. God can, of course, awaken such trust in forlorn and neglected hearts bereft of that human love which is a parable of the Divine. But it is through the experiences men have of each other's help and good-will that He usually fosters the instinct of faith. Contact with pain awakens sympathy, and the sufferer himself notes the response and receives a new revelation of kind-heartedness in those he had hitherto thought of as cold and unfeeling. "Everybody is so kind" is a constant exclamation in the sick-room. The barriers of caste itself fall, and old, gnarled, knotty resentments melt away like mist. Is it not clear that in the new psychic atmosphere evolved by pain it becomes easy for men to cast themselves upon the outstreaming compassions of God? It is as though God had said, "A day of grace, wooing to effectual faith, shall come back to this man like the days of his dawning life. Before the end is reached I will surround him with human tendernesses like those which shone upon his childhood. I will make it as easy for him to trust as in the far-off years when he belonged to the kingdom

and the chill of a shivering scepticism had not yet entered into his fibres." God's chastening hand falls heavy upon his frame and he heaves and trembles with the great distress, whilst tears rise in the eyes of those who watch at his side, and hands as little apt to help as the hands of mummies are restless to minister; and thus God puts before the man's eyes living parables and object-lessons of the love which redeems man's soul from destruction. The act of faith in God is made easier than it could ever become in a frivolous, selfish, pleasure-seeking world.

In laying the upper courses of the pyramids, the builders found it necessary to make a sloping ascent from the banks of the Nile right up to the apex. The foundations of the steep causeway, up which the masses of Syenite granite were carried to be placed upon the summit, are still to be seen. And so when the top-stone is to be put upon His people's faith, on the banks of the river, God prepares this sloping ascent of human love, this pathway of sympathy and gentleness by which the soul can pass to the crowning act of faith. And the foundations of this ascent are laid in weakness and pain.

The sufferings of those who are appointed to die appeal to our affections and help in reconciling us to the inevitable separation. It is one of the penalties of a sensitive and highly-organised family life that God should need to plead with us by these stern arguments to surrender our loved ones to the new life He has made ready for them. The cry of the agonised

sufferer calms the storm and turbulence which agitate us, and we bow our heads in meekness when the end comes, and, perhaps, even welcome it. To take through the fires those whose providential course on earth is closed may be the gentlest method of removing them. Our friends are themselves thereby weaned from earth and we are brought to relinquish our selfish and obstinate hold upon them. If all deaths were sudden and painless the shock to the survivors would madden or turn them to stone, and would only suit a world where the people had short memories and shallow hearts. At the sight of distress and struggle, the love within us begins to array itself on the side of the supreme will and helps our resignation. Inscrutable benignities often hide themselves beneath the shadows that fall thick upon the death-bed of a good man.

The house of mourning is often a gate of heaven where faith in immortality and eternal life is strangely revived. The writer of this book of Ecclesiastes had perhaps no such thought in his mind, but it is true for us. Immortality has been brought to light by Jesus Christ, especially through His revelation of the Divine love, which is the groundwork of our assurance. But faith in this doctrine is reinforced by all that we see of the moral effect of suffering upon the true servants of God. The loved and the lost are endeared to us by the pain through which they have bravely and patiently passed, and we cannot think that the hope of compensative honour

and blessedness is ruthlessly cut off. Character surely has not been improved for extinction, if there is a providence over the steps of man's moral ascent. The refining furnace of the sick-chamber is not without its hints of a treasury beyond the grave, into which the pure gold will be gathered. The gold is not refined to be ground at last like that of Aaron's calf into powder, and to be irrecoverably scattered upon the stream. The aspirations which reach out towards a blessed hereafter become more active in the house of mourning. At first we find it almost impossible to correlate the darkened and silent chamber of death with the Father's house in which are many mansions. We can see nothing but the mournful associations of mortality, and our vision of eternal life is mocked. But, after a time, the humiliating marks of dissolution are forgotten, and the patience, courage, and trust, intensified through days and nights of weakness and pain, shine forth, the pledges of a better and a nobler life. Is it our love which affirms afresh in the house of mourning the grand dogma of immortality? Well. Be it so. Love is the divinest thing within us, the instinct which is least often wrong and has been most richly satisfied, and it has a more sacred right to pronounce a dogma than any other faculty within us. Life and immortality are still brought to light by love—by love in those sensitive, exalted, and far-seeing states, which so often come in the house of mourning.

Intimate fellowship with pain makes men accessible to great inspirations for present service. If you want to find the cradle of some of the great charities which bless the world, go to the house of mourning and look upon its tears. It is a high education into the most sacred meaning of the Christian religion "to visit the widow and the fatherless in their affliction"; and the larger world is sure to profit by such visits, no less than the widow and the fatherless. Balls and banquets too often breed heart-burnings, and a diabolic war has more than once had its beginnings in palaces fluttering with frivolous and incompatible guests. The pity which heals social disease often flows forth from a home riven with sorrow, and secrets of benignity may be discovered under the deepest shadows. It was when the wife of John Bright's youth lay dead in the house that Richard Cobden called upon him and offered the best cordial for a broken heart, a part in the work of cheapening the food and abating the distress of the perishing poor. It was from the presence of this supreme bereavement that this eloquent patriot went forth fired with a sacred passion for the cause of the famished and the destitute. Harriet Beecher Stowe probably played as great a part in negro emancipation as any of the political leaders of her day, and she writes in her biography of the call that came to use her pen against the slave system of the Southern States. It was in the house of mourning she found her inspiration.

She writes: "The most beautiful and the most loved of my seven children lies buried near my Cincinnati residence. It was at his dying bed and at his grave that I learned what a poor slave mother may feel when her child is torn from her. In those depths of sorrow which seemed to me immeasurable, it was my only prayer to God that such anguish might not be suffered in vain. There were circumstances about his death of such peculiar bitterness, of what seemed almost cruel suffering, that I felt that I could never be consoled for it, unless this crushing of my own heart might enable me to work out some great good to others." And thus it came to pass that the dead wife in the house at Rochdale, and the dead child in the graveyard at Cincinnati, became vital links in mighty movements for ameliorating the lot of the English poor and for freeing the American negro from his bondage. Perhaps the results issuing from these deaths may work out in the unknown life an exceeding and eternal weight of glory and compensating joy. Houses of mourning often become homes of healing for our social woes, and the world would be a more distressing moral desolation than it is but for the contribution made towards the work of solving its problems by the noble army of sufferers.

If we may trust the testimony of Christ's adversaries, and His own disciples were ready to concede the facts which were made the occasion of the sneer, our Master Himself often displayed a marked pre-

ference for the house of good cheer and happy fellowship. Did He direct His steps thither because He could best find His lost sheep in the flowery nooks of the mountains? Did He make Himself a foil to the asceticism of the forerunner, because His strong and holy nature could dispense with those searching and bitter lessons of humiliation which often await us in the house of mourning? In His nature there was no worldliness, unbelieving pride, or temper of self-idolising independence to be corrected. His own heart at least did not need to be purified by pain, and bettered through the saddening of the countenance. Not for a moment that He withdrew Himself from scenes of grief and lamentation, for He had that secret of a perfect humanity which enabled Him to rejoice with those who rejoiced, and to weep with those who wept. But with the cross in view, it was a mark of surpassing fortitude for Him to be present at wedding feast or banquet. His death could not have been the soul-rending and awful sacrifice it was destined to be, unless He tasted the exhilarations of a pure and wholesome life on His way to the cross. It is no struggle for a recluse or an ascetic to face the end. By the asperities of years he has weaned himself from the world, and death comes as a welcome reprieve. Death has been discounted by long habits of self-mortification, and the mind has grown accustomed to its associations. Jesus proved the unselfishness of His separation from that life of earth

with which He had become incorporated, by filling Himself with the sunshine and the satisfaction of social fellowship before He passed on to offer Himself up to the redeeming will of the Father. His participation in the hospitality and social converse of the times was to teach men that the house of mourning was not to be the goal of human destiny. Its disciplines fit for a nobler festival, to which men shall come from the north, the south, the east, and the west. "In His presence is fulness of joy; at His right hand are pleasures for evermore." God doth not willingly grieve or afflict the children of men. When we can do without pain, and have reached the Christlike ideal, we shall enter into the blessedness of God Himself. We shall pass from the shadows which are not altogether malign into the brilliance of the unshadowed day. Suffering is subservient to character, and if we set ourselves resolutely to reach the best, we shall have the assurance that all things we suffer in ourselves, or through sympathy with others, shall work out the "exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

XV.

THE RESURRECTION AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCE.

"That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection."—PHILIPPIANS iii. 10.

THERE are two aspects in which St Paul looks at the subject of our Lord's resurrection from the dead. In the epistle to the Corinthians, he treats it as a sure fact of history attested by well-known and trustworthy witnesses. Of these witnesses, the greater part were living at the time he wrote his epistle. He enumerates Cephas, the twelve, five hundred brethren in Galilee, James, and, last of all, himself, as one born out of due time. In thus including himself amongst the witnesses to the resurrection, he implies that the vision on the way to Damascus was not inward only, but had its corresponding outward reality. It would be well for those who are Christ's followers sometimes to look at the question from this standpoint. The faith of the Church would be more luminous and unassailable, if the narratives of the resurrection were only as carefully read, and as thoroughly mastered, as the

capital items in the daily papers. We meet with Christians who know the ins and outs of the latest bankruptcy, obscure geographical points in the international disputes of the passing moment, the attitude of Cabinet ministers towards each other and the unwritten history behind it, with a more painstaking accuracy than they know the details of an incident deeper in its significance for the future of humanity than the domestic fortunes and the imperial policies of all the powers of Christendom put together. They are unwilling to take as much trouble in fitting together the pieces of evidence, as they would take in reading up the cross-examinations at a trial in which they have no personal stake whatever. The Bible they skim in a state of somnambulism, and read the morning papers as if they were reading for very life.

But Paul looks also at the subject of the resurrection from another standpoint. On his way to Damascus he had heard the risen Jesus speak from the skies, and seen the glory of His presence. Of this fact he needed no further confirmation, and as far as he himself was concerned, the witness of others was superfluous. Nothing could add to his certainty. But he recognises that the resurrection of Jesus is not only a fact of history, but a supreme vitalising force in the daily experience of His followers. The event was to have its permanent sign and manifestation in the spiritual consciousness of the Church. It must impress its own living and majestic energies

upon the souls of Christ's followers. The knowledge of Jesus and of the power of His resurrection must be always growing, and always growing through the soul's surrender of meaner interests and attractions, and entire submission to the living will of Jesus Christ.

The resurrection was a power to produce manifold moral effects in the minds of the first disciples. It was no light burden which the first Easter morn removed from the heart of the Galilean brotherhood. It gave Simon Peter the absolution of which he could not fully assure himself whilst the absolving lips were silent in the grave. It answered the doubts of Thomas, and made him believing as the others. It saved them, one and all, from the sickening suspicion that their faith had been misplaced, and that Jesus was not more far-sighted than themselves. It called forth a new life in the souls from which hope, loyalty, devotion were slowly ebbing away. It turned the lamentations of broken-hearted women into songs. It changed the view hitherto taken of death, and gave the courage which fitted for future martyrdom. And these moral effects were continuous, and not the heritage of those only who were in the garden and the upper room. And Paul's great desire was not, perhaps, to have the vision repeated, but to find these moral and spiritual effects asserting themselves still more vividly in his life.

The student of science tells us that all energy is convertible into kindred forms. Light, heat, electri-

city, sound, may perhaps be degrees of the same force which is addressing men in different ways, and through varied senses. More than one inventor asserts that he is able to change the rays of light which come from the sun into electrical energy. Life, suggests a popular writer, is built up of atoms which have the power to attract and repel each other, and death is such a loss of that power that their vibrancy ceases, and they fall inert into space. Whatever is seen, heard, tasted, felt, may be a modification of one original substance, for all forces are convertible, and chemical elements are being resolved into simpler elements. Whether this theory is correct or not, the forces which asserted themselves in Christ's resurrection reappear in many forms in the life of His redeemed people. That resurrection transmutes itself into a power through which I am taken out of condemnation and brought into newness of life. It is the source from which I receive my baptisms of spiritual power. In the deliverance from peril and death vouchsafed to the Church and its members, this sublime event of which the apostles were the witnesses asserts itself anew. And in the last day the Lord's own rising will prove itself the germinal movement in the resurrection of His servants. Its power will have a crowning illustration in our deliverance from the bonds of death and the abasement of the sepulchre.

1. THE APOSTLE IMPLIES IN THESE WORDS THAT THE LORD'S RESURRECTION WAS THE CHANNEL

THROUGH WHICH POWER WAS CONVEYED FOR THE REDEMPTION OF HIS PEOPLE FROM THE CONDEMNATION OF SIN. And this was to be an experience of ever-growing depth and certainty. Its energies were to effect the release of believing disciples from the impending threats of the law. This relation of the resurrection to the free, joyful, inward life, upon which pardon has been sealed, is too often forgotten. The attitude of the Church often recalls the sculptured "Pietas" placed in the cathedrals and galleries of Southern Europe. A pallid Mary, with drooping, half-veiled head and tear-filled eyes, is made to support across her lap the stiff, worn form of her dead Son, after He has been taken down from the cross. She looks with fixed eye upon the thorn-stabbed brow as the head falls helplessly back over her knee. Such is too often the posture of the Church in her meditations. We are told to look at the pierced side, the gashed hands and feet, the empurpled brow, and all the terrible accessories of the tragedy. Within recent years the worship of the Sacred Heart has become a specialised form of devotion in the Roman Church.

We must not understate the significance of the death, but as a power for the justification of the guilty it was only completed through the resurrection. Death was the sign of wrath, and humanly speaking, if the history had been abruptly broken off at this point, the Father's holy wrath against sin would have been aggravated rather than appeased.

Death itself could have been no pledge of His satisfaction in the sacrifice. It may be only a beginning of judgment, and it offers no presage of the dawn of a better day. If nothing lies beyond the cross, if this grim scene is the final bourne to which human thought can pierce, how shall we know that the sacrifice of Himself offered by the Son has been accepted as a final expiation for human guilt? Your wildest despairs, your bitterest forebodings, your most haunting fears, would be more than fitting had the story come to a sudden end with the darkness that was over all the land from the sixth to the ninth hour. The death of the victim, even if the victim be representative, does not always tell of pacification. Apart from the resurrection on the third day and its after signs, there was no effectual witness of the Father's reconciliation to the race of men.

In the writings of the apostle Paul, the resurrection is looked upon as a factor equally important in the processes of grace with the death itself. "Who is He that condemneth? It is Christ that died; yea, rather, that is risen again." The root of condemnation was taken away by the cross, but the stain and reproach with which sin had covered all human history was effectually wiped out by the glorious fact of the resurrection. "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." The faith through which we are made partakers of Jesus Christ cannot spring from a grave, whilst the grave

holds its victim. Apart from the consummation of Christ's work in His victory over the grave, and in His successive appearances to chosen witnesses, the faith of His followers would have been a worthless guess, and the cross the lonely monument of a transcendent martyrdom and a lost cause.

Several years ago, a picture exhibited in the Royal Academy was based upon the story that Oliver Cromwell, on the night following the execution of Charles the First, stole into the room at Whitehall to look upon the body of his former foe. The painting shows him in the act of drawing aside the sheet that had been cast over the dead king. Into the lines of that intent face the artist has skilfully combined inexorable firmness and a faint touch of pity: but there is no sign of scattering clouds. The features of the Protector seem to say: "Alas, poor king! it must needs be so. And perhaps the end is not yet. Not quite sure is it that the scaffold will mark the end of the trouble. More heads may need to fall." The execution about which historians and jurists are still debating was looked upon as inevitable. No cavalier could have read in those strongly-lined features licence for a new opposition to the rights of the Parliament. No friend of Charles could have read encouragement in the face that was looking upon the havoc of block and scaffold. But if the Protector could have undone the day, and have freed the captive of death, such an act might have been

read into an assurance of peace. If a resurrection could have been brought to pass, that would have been a pledge of amnesty.

Cross and blood, thorn-crown and furrowed flesh from which life has sped, could never assure rebels of the grace of the great God whose laws have been despised. But the resurrection is a witness that Divine favour is bestowed again upon the new humanity, of which Jesus was the beginning, the type, and the living advocate. Till the dawn came, with its vistas of angels about the empty tomb, and the risen Lord Himself at hand to comfort and re-assemble His followers, the heavens were clothed with sackcloth, and the earth did not cease to shudder with horror. "Christ was delivered for our offences, but raised again for our justification." Apart from that manifest victory over death to which the cross led on, His soul-travail would have been in vain.

St Peter also tells us, "God raised Him from the dead, and gave Him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God." If the history had closed with shame, scoffing, and ignominy, it would have been madness to wait, to trust, and to endure. Christ's sponsorship was to be continued beyond the Cross, and the resurrection gave Him a fitting investiture for His great vocation. Our faith and hope would not abound if an advocate appeared in court to represent us, clothed like a convict. The resurrection justifies us by the stamp of honour it puts upon

Him through whom we expect our absolution and ennoblement.

The resurrection of Jesus not only looked back to His strange death, and attested its efficacy as a spring of grace; it looked forward also to the common resurrection, of which it was the earnest, for in the coming resurrection the justification of the saved race will be universally proclaimed. The Bible always treats death as a judicial brand that has been put upon human sin. The story of the Fall is a vapid fable if this be not its lesson. Why is not death as natural to us as the falling of the petal to the plant, and the fluttering down of the russet leaf to the impassive oak which sheds it? We are told that the ancient Jews did not disquiet themselves about death, but met it as a part of the benign cosmic order. Several years ago, Mr Lucian Wolfe was trying to show, in one of the reviews, that Judaism was a species of inspired secularism, and that to the Hebrew imagination death had no terror. St Paul belonged to a different school of thought, for he avows that death has a sting, and the strength of it was sin; and St Paul might have quoted the writer of the Ninetieth Psalm in support of his view. He at least looked upon death as an expression of God's wrath against sin. After comparing human life to the grass, he goes on to say: "We are consumed by Thine anger, and by Thy wrath are we troubled." In whatever shape it presents itself, Death brings in its train a sense of hot, devastating, stormful

antagonism. There was more in its incidence than the painless falling of the leaf. And then he goes on to speak of the term of human life, of fourscore years of labour and sorrow, and exclaims: "Who knoweth the power of Thine anger? According to Thy fear so is Thy wrath." At fourscore years, and with a long experience of pain and vexation, death might surely have been thought of as natural, painless, welcome. But it still tells of wrath, and is a condemning brand, eating into the flesh of every man. The resurrection of Jesus not only takes His own sacred person from beneath the death-brand of shame, but proclaims that this mark of ignominy is obliterated from the redeemed race. It is the essential basis for our justification.

The first steps of the process which frees us from condemnation are secret and unseen. The resurrection of the last great day will openly release Christ's people from the penal humiliations under which they have been placed for long ages. In rising from the tomb Jesus Christ brings with Him the Father's pledge of this more complete justification. "Raised again for our justification." If God had only hinted His forgiveness to our half-awakened souls, and had left thick shadows to lie upon the cross, the redemptive work would have been discredited by notes of reserve, uncertainty, painful qualification. It would have been a paltry rehabilitation of Joseph if Pharaoh's forgiveness had been obscurely hinted at by dumb-show, and he had been made to play

prime-minister in prison clothes. Mordecai and his race must not only be told how to frustrate the decree of death; but they must be emboldened by the great patriot's triumphal procession through the streets. The resurrection took our Elder Brother, who was made sin for us, out of the prison-house, and put upon His head the king's crown, the symbol at once of the royal favour, and the uplifting from the dust, the ignominy and the evil subjection of death of all His kindred. Now the apostle expected to find within his own experience a sense of release from condemnation, commensurate in power and authority with the sublime incident of the resurrection, because organically related to it. His absolution from guilt must be as effectual and as legibly Divine as the mighty fact out of which it grew. The sovereign force which gave back to the disciples their lost faith and their buried Lord, must be a living, majestic element in the daily life of the disciples. If our apprehension of the Divine forgiveness is faint, changeful, sinewless, we do not truly know the power of Christ's resurrection. Our justification should grow in the fulness of its grace and the strength of its assurance till it matches this root-fact in the Christian religion. The righteousness of faith can never entirely clothe us, unless we cherish a confidence determined by the fact that God raised His Son from the dead and gave Him glory. Is the Father's witness to the faith which is in us, as luminous as the witness to Jesus and

His work, borne by the Father through the resurrection? Is it our master-aim to possess this knowledge? Is the knowledge progressive? "That I may know . . . the power of His resurrection."

2. THE APOSTLE THOUGHT OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION AS THE CENTRE FROM WHICH THE NEW MANIFESTATIONS OF A DIVINE LIFE IN MEN DERIVED THIER ANIMATING AND UPHOLDING FORCES. The death of the Holy One of God was only a part of the satisfaction made for the sinful race. The putting right of those who had got woefully wrong must be completed by vital processes emanating from the indwelling presence of the risen Lord. In the verses with which our text is linked the apostle expresses his aspiration in a two-fold form. He speaks of his absorbing desire to attain the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, and the issue of that desire is that he "may be found in Christ." When that goal is reached Christ becomes the encircling defence of the believer and all his interests, the realm in which he lives and moves and breathes, and beyond which he does not dare to go. And then he starts his thought afresh on the same keynote—the knowledge of Christ, and obviously has in mind the complementary idea that Christ must be in the believer, as well as the believer in Christ, the light of all seeing, the inspiration of his activity, and the life-current moving through his spiritual consciousness. And this Christ, the first-begotten from the dead, who in the power of

His resurrection-life enshrines Himself in believers, not only prefigures the resurrection of the last day, but through His indwelling presence makes His own elect fellow-heirs of the plenitude of that transfigured humanity upon which a new seal was put in the resurrection.

This thought is anticipated by an incident which is obviously symbolic in its motive. The scene when Christ appeared to the eleven, as they were gathered together on the evening of the resurrection, is a faint anticipation of the Pentecost. The Eternal Father had breathed back into the form of Him who so strangely visits His fearful followers the spirit committed to His hands, as He had once breathed life into the first Adam. And it is the work of the risen Lord to diffuse upon others the life which the Father has inspired anew into Himself. The ceaseless, unbroken gift of the Spirit is the pulse-sign by which the resurrection-life declares itself. He breathed upon them, and said unto them, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." It was this inner and essential energy the apostle desired to know more copiously which consummates the justification of the believer through the Spirit.

Does this power conveyed in symbol differ in any way from that power of the Holy Spirit possessed by God's servants in Old Testament times? Yes. To those who are members of Christ the Spirit henceforth comes charged with the special instincts and sympathies of the ideal humanity manifested

and immortalised through the resurrection. The Spirit received something back from the incarnate nature of which it had been the vitalising principle. The question whether the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son as well as from the Father is not so unmeaning as the unfriendly critics of religious controversies often assume; for if the Spirit proceeds from the Son, He comes humanised with the interests, sympathies, and affections of the life Jesus lived upon earth, and is able to convey into the disciples the vital virtues of the God-Man. The Spirit maintains an organic connection between the glorified humanity of Jesus and sincere believers, and the apostle sought to know in ever-enlarging degree the peculiar energies derived through this connection. The power of the resurrection had brought about His arrest on a crusade of bloodshed, it was still working within Him, and through Him upon others, and He expected to have a yet fuller experience of its mystic forces. The Spirit adopts into its own life the genius of that ideal humanity present in the risen head of the race and imparts it to all who are joined to Christ.

The apostle reminds us that we are "quickened together with Christ" and speaks of the believer as "planted," not only "in the likeness of" the Lord's "death," but of "His resurrection" also. This is more than an arbitrary simile used to set forth the fact that we are lifted out of spiritual death into newness of life. It is a collateral result of the resurrec-

tion. If the death has a power to attract us into conformity with it, the resurrection must surely have the same power. Indeed, the power that acts upon us is a continuation of the same power which brought a living Jesus from the grave. The same flood of sunshine which frees the Rhone from its glacier-prison opens the bloom in the cleft of the rock, that smiles like a babe just refreshed with sleep. And the same tide of power which unlocked the sealed tomb where Jesus lay, opens the pitiless heart of the persecutor and brings the vernal tenderness of the evangel into the quiet life of Lydia. We are planted in the likeness of the resurrection and the elemental correspondence which is to issue in glorified sonship must assert itself within us more and more.

3. THE APOSTLE PAUL THOUGHT ALSO OF THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION AS A TRIUMPHANT COUNTERACTIVE TO THE PERILS AND DEATH-RISKS OF A HOSTILE WORLD. All providential interpositions became linked in his thought with the miracle which crowned the earthly career of the Son of God. The story of redemption from the captivity of the grave seemed to echo itself in every fresh act of the Divine hand. The sacred energies of the resurrection were working for the release of God's people from stress and violence and always demonstrating themselves afresh. In the stormy horizons frowning over St Paul as he pursued his vocation he saw the kindling after-glows of the first Easter day. A sense of this sublime event possessed him and beams

of its supernal glory, now and again, fell upon his pathway. This power which cut short his own persecuting schemes when he was in sight of Damascus was still quelling the fury of Christ's adversaries. In a striking passage in the first chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, he speaks of his escape from the mob at Ephesus as a revelation of the self-same power which was manifested in the resurrection of Jesus. "We ourselves have had the sentence of death within ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead; who delivered us out of so great a death, and will deliver; on whom we have set our hope that He will still deliver us." The assault was so cruel and unrestrained that he felt as though he had passed into the grave and had been brought out again, and the incident prepared him for a final experience of deliverance from death and its bondage. The resurrection was more than a romantic symbol of providential escape from "deaths oft." The tide of life from the risen Head was flowing into lowly members and bearing them beyond the reach of violence and untimely fatality. The virtues of this immortal presence were attending the steps of those who followed its leadings, making them and their work alike inviolable. The resurrection had struck a new keynote in the economies of the world. The angels of the tomb were the heralds of a providence which now encircled the Church of the Redeemed as well as the Redeemer Himself. If we make proof of the

resurrection power which justifies from sin and renews into righteousness, we shall have fresh assurances against hazard and death. God is always loosening our souls and bodies from destruction, unlocking the gates of a grave-prison that cannot detain us, and putting resurrection halos into our common days. The resurrection is a typical miracle to which the Christian Church should ever be looking back as the Jewish Church kept within its field of daily vision the pilgrimage through the Red Sea waves.

Water has no power to generate electrical energy as it lies in the still, tideless lake, the sluggish river which moves placidly through a flowered landscape, or in the dikes and canals of Holland, the land of tulips and dairy farms. The engineer puts his turbines and his dynamos where torrents come thundering through the frowning chasms and rushing out of the gloomy valleys. In the dim mountain defiles, and amidst the sheer precipices where giant waterfalls are at play, light awaits the call of science, which can change the midnight darkness of great empires into noonday. And the power of the resurrection, the glory of its unknown forces, its mystic possibilities are not always known in the quiet scenes of life and amidst its pastoral serenities. It was Paul's tribulations which made luminous the force through which the shadows of death and the grave were dispelled. It is through stress and danger, through turmoil

and conflict that the glory of Him who raised up Jesus from the dead manifests itself afresh.

By daily deliverances, which illustrate in new forms the power of the resurrection, God is invigorating our faith so that it may sustain the test to which it will be put when the earthly end comes. "Who hath delivered, and will yet deliver." After his experience of life from the dead in the riot of Ephesus the apostle could believe in a resurrection power at Rome, and assure himself that the second ordeal would be as triumphantly passed as the first. The love and power shown in raising the Incarnate Son from the dead would reach in due time to all bearing the name of that Son and doing His work. Do forebodings sometimes settle upon our spirits as we look out towards the future? The resurrection of Jesus is a supreme object-lesson that should be always before our faith. Paul had such a deep sense of the manifold virtues of this crowning event in the life of the Lord, that he seemed to be daily passing through a series of minor resurrections, destined to sum themselves up in a last release from the shadows and humiliations of the grave. The eye which rested upon the Holy One as He slept within the sealed sepulchre never slumbers, and is upon us in life and in death. The breath which quickened once more the marred form taken down from the cross, will enter into us and make us live in a fairer and more royal world.

4. THE APOSTLE REGARDS THOSE PROCESSES OF GRACE AND PROVIDENCE WHICH ISSUE FROM THE GLORIFIED HUMANITY OF THE LORD, TO REPEL THE EVILS OF THE EARTHLY LOT, AS REACHING THEIR CLIMAX IN THE BELIEVER'S VICTORY OVER THE RAVAGE AND TERROR OF DEATH. The power of the resurrection working within and around us ought to nerve with the fortitude of an unflinching faith and change the associations of the tomb. He who is alive to all the influences emanating from the person of the risen Lord loses his dread of the unknown hereafter, and his tears for the departed are disburdened of selfish repining and despair. He no longer shrinks from death as though the resurrection of the head failed to convey an assurance of victory to the members. It was through a growing sense of this power that Paul hoped to "attain to the resurrection of the dead."

In this striking phrase the apostle does not imply that the resurrection of the last day is conditional and that saints only are to be the subjects of it. But that event will have no ethical significance for those who are not prepared for its issues by a deep and growing fellowship with the risen Lord. The resurrection will come to some who have not reached up to the ideals of Him who is "the first fruits," and will, therefore, have no note of triumph in it. The coronation which comes by a turn of the wheel to the man who has allowed

himself to drift into imbecility and degradation, is no occasion of honour but accentuates his shame. The harvest which offers itself to unprepared husbandmen is an ingathering of reproach and contempt. Unless there be labour equal to the promise of the fields, machinery for reaping and binding the heavy ears, barns and storehouses in which to lay up the grain, it is no better than dearth. The golden weeks dawn and disappear, leaving those who are unprepared in more dire distress than before. The resurrection may so come to those who do not feel its earliest pulses in the present days of grace, and who fail to grow into that rich ideal of human life which was glorified in our Lord's resurrection from the dead. The earnest of victory over death in the solemn day, which will soon meet every one of us, is to know through all our daily experiences "the power of His resurrection." So shall we "attain unto the resurrection of the dead," and be "joint-heirs" with Christ in His everlasting reign.

XVI.

THE PRINCE AND HIS SAVING GIFTS.

"Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance unto Israel, and remission of sins."—ACTS v. 31.

THESE words spoken in the Council-chamber at Jerusalem, are an apology for the continued ministry of the apostles. The Sadducees have actively identified themselves with the party of the high priest in a new policy of persecution which brings Peter and his comrade before the Sanhedrim. These Jewish rationalists had probably been stirred up against the disciples by spreading rumours of a resurrection, and a new outburst of zeal fanned by the alleged appearances of the risen Lord. The death of Jesus on the cross had not been followed by that paralysis which was once anticipated, and which would have inevitably followed if the seals of the sepulchre had been unbroken. The disciples of the Crucified, far from melting away like the insurgents under Theudas and Judas of Galilee, when their leaders had been put to death, were gathering

new courage. The keen-witted Gamaliel at once detects a note of difference between the early and the later histories. During the third year of the Lord's ministry, the year of discouragement and persecution, the power of working miracles almost disappeared; but now this power has been restored, and at a crisis when, humanly speaking, it should have become extinct. Their lives were almost as full as the life of their great pattern with signs and wonders as they taught the word. The surrounding country heard of the apostle's fame, and a daily invasion of the sick, the halt, and the blind, turned the city into a camp-hospital. The gratitude of multitudes was enlisted, and the rulers saw in this movement a threat of their own overthrow. "Ye have filled Jerusalem with this doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." The more credulous of the officials, perhaps, thought that the cry of a disembodied soul for the reparation of a wrong was implied in these rumoured apparitions; whilst the sceptical Sadducees feared vengeance at the hands of the multitudes who were now siding with Jesus and His apostles. Whether the retribution feared was to be natural or supernatural, Sadducees and Pharisees were at one in their forebodings. But Peter in his defence puts another complexion upon these events. The manifestations of Jesus, and His living presence within the apostles, did not make for vengeance or recrimination. The Spirit of the meek Galilean was healing and helping

men in the city guilty of His blood. He had ascended to larger life, more heroic power, and deathless sovereignty, not to be avenged upon His adversaries, but to save them. His richest and most satisfying recompense, His kingliest prerogative, His crown of crowns, He had received in the right to convey to men the secret of repentance, and to unbind the burden of their sin.

Peter's doctrine of grace, proclaimed in the presence of his comrades, goes quite as far as that of the apostle Paul. In certain schools it is a pet theory that Peter and Paul were life-long antagonists, and that the truths they taught could not be brought into agreement. Peter, it is said, held by the past, and was ineradicably legal in temper; whilst Paul, in teaching justification by faith, and disparaging salvation by the works of the law, so as to magnify the free gift in Christ Jesus, outran all contemporary belief. But it is inconceivable that the apostle of the flight and of the denial, restored to favour and to service by the tenderness and generosity of the risen Lord, should have coloured his interpretation of the new faith with the legal prejudices of the past. The memory of his undeserved forgiveness is fresh in the heart of Peter as he stands up before the Council, and at the root and beginning of all religious life he puts a doctrine of free remission. Conversion itself flows from the twofold gift of the exalted King. Not only must the full blessing of justification be

received by a simple act of faith, but the repentance which is the encircling atmosphere within which faith awakens, is a largess from Him whom God raised up and enriched, that He might enrich the race. A disciple reaches capacities for character and service only when the Master Himself replenishes the moral void within him. Without any concession to the prejudices of the legalists who faced him, the restored apostate tells the Council that apart from the grace bestowed by the Crucified, they could not exercise the repentance to which the prophets urged, or receive that remission promised again and again in the Scriptures. If Peter had held a doctrine of righteousness by the works of the law, now would have been the time to preach it. His audience was sympathetic with that aspect of religion, and he might have established a working compromise with the officials of the metropolis, which would have saved himself and his comrades from not a little trouble. But repentance and forgiveness alike must be bestowed by the hands nailed through their instigation to the cross, bestowed simply and only as royal bounties. In speaking of the gifts with which the triumphant King replenishes His Church on earth, Paul names the inspirations which make apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers, so that the Church may be edified. But Peter goes back to an earlier beginning, and speaks of the gifts which make men contrite before they are incorporated into the Church. Every

repentant impulse, and every absolving act which takes away sin and replaces pain by peace, comes down from above, from the Father of lights, and from the Son whom He has uplifted to be the one minister of grace to men.

Peter's words cast an instructive side-light upon the motives which rule the order of the heavenly world. The Father governs it in pity to His rebellious people, and the invisible, no less than the visible, spheres above us distil blessing upon a thankless race. The highest glory attaches itself to the most perfect service, and would fade if that service were to cease. The home-coming of God's Son into the city of light is not merely a transcendent spectacle. It is upon lofty, deathless unselfishness that infinite distinction is stamped. Lower applications of this law are suggested in two of the parables. The man faithful in the use of pounds is raised to dominion over ten cities, and upon the servant who invests his talents with wisdom and fidelity is put a stewardship which exceeds in honour. Angels are not called into their splendid life to swell the pomp of the skies, but to be channels of the Divine gentleness and charity to those who are heirs of salvation. Their life is not self-centred, for they rejoice in solitary examples of human repentance. The realm of light is no place of useless glitter and empty emolument, a magnified earthly court. No thrones in the holy place above are thrones of barren power, no gradations in the celestial ranks are symbols of empty state, no star-

like altitudes of honour gilded sinecures, no apotheosis that of a quiescent, outdying consciousness such as Buddhism postulates. Every throne stands for an activity, every dignity for an unsleeping force working out help and redemption in the lower world, every gleam of glory for a perpetuated ministry of comfort and deliverance. And to this principle the Lord's own exaltation conforms. It was no coronation durbar dazzling the eye and leaving the dim millions forlorn and desolate as before. It is true He was returning to the fulness of His old fellowship in the Triune life, crowned afresh with the glory which He had before the foundation of the world. But the Father's purpose was not satisfied when the Son was seated upon His throne. That throne, and the forces it symbolised, was an instrument only, and the Divine purpose returns to the earth and finds for itself a new beginning as the children of earth are made contrite, washed from their pollutions, and lifted into kingdoms of light and blessedness. He is exalted above all principalities and powers, that He may do a higher work in sanctifying the people redeemed by His cross than the loftiest angels had the character or the capacity to undertake. The Father expresses at once His own compassion towards a rebellious people, and answers to the unfathomed deeps in the soul of His Son, by making Him the crowned servant of the human race which had despised and rejected Him. It was to help men,

even the rebellious also, that He was uplifted to His throne, as well as to His cross. In other words, the Father has raised Him to a new sovereignty of active redemption, and so recompensed the soul-travail of His cross and shame.

Simon Peter's words give us a new sense of the beneficence of Christ's character. When he described Jesus as exalted for the express purpose of drawing men by His princely gifts to a better mind and a nobler destiny, he bears his testimony to the infinite unselfishness of Jesus. Peter's personal experience of the Master's glad and ungrudging forgiveness helped him to this view. His best reward is to serve on high an Israel guilty of His blood, to melt and pardon, to upraise and ennoble the coarse assassins and their yet guiltier principals who had compassed His death. Is there any parallel to this in the history of mankind? The devout and the long-suffering often find their patience sorely strained by a stiff-necked generation, and long for final rest from the burdens of rule. If we could interrogate the spirit of a murdered king, we should not find him anxious to come back to the vacant earthly throne, even if his person could be made inviolable by a guard of angels. Moses would scarcely have thought himself rewarded for his fidelity by another term of forty years in the wilderness at the head of a mutinous and intractable mob of tribesmen. Whatever interpretation we may attach to the raising up of Samuel at Endor, the

narrative is at least true to human nature when it depicts Samuel as asking: "Why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up?" The dead prophet wished to be rid of Saul and all the complications his fractious policy had involved. The man who serves a censorious and disloyal people likes to dwell apart in his own tabernacle when the release from life's burden comes. But here is something without parallel. One who has been worse treated than was Moses by the murmuring Israelites, or Samuel by Saul and his rebellious people, wishes to spend His recovered life in serving those who rejected and put Him to death.

The superstitions of the human race everywhere express a low judgment of human character, and show that in the past no such ideal of forgiveness as this had ever been dreamed. The dread that children and primitive races have of apparitions rests upon the idea that spirits which have left the body still carry with them the memory of past wrongs, and cannot rest till the sense of injury is appeased by vengeance. Scenes of bloodshed it is thought are haunted by wraiths of those who have suffered there. The spirit which has not had right meted out to it comes back to blight and to terrify. So strong is this idea in the Eastern world that a sufferer at the hands of a kinsman or neighbour, who can find no rest, often commits suicide hoping to acquire in the disembodied state a power of retaliation not possessed in life. Where the belief in re-

incarnations prevails, men and women stand in constant dread of finding the soul of some unappeased enemy appearing within the home clothed in the family flesh and blood. This implies a low conception of character, and almost excludes from human life the possibility of a great forgiveness. Perhaps some of the Jews to whom Peter was speaking associated the alleged appearances of Jesus to the disciples with His desire for retribution, because of His unjust death. That was a current estimate of character, an estimate applied even to Jesus by those who did not know the amazing secret of His love. Peter tells them there is and can be no recrimination in such a heart. He had been raised from the tomb and enthroned on high to bless the people who put Him to shame. What a sublime conception of character! The Father knew full well that no honour, no angelic eulogy, no far-spreading anthem could satisfy His quenchless pity for mankind. "How shall the loyalty of Thy life amongst men be best rewarded? What shall be done to recompense Thy death, so terrible, so obedient, so sweetly submissive? Shall princes of light be created to glorify Thee, and to wait in their legions about Thy feet? What new power shall be entrusted to Thy hands?" Hear the answer which reveals His inmost heart. "Give that which I may bestow upon others. Let Me hold the key to the heart of an impenitent world. Let Me wash the leper, and bring peace to wrath-smitten souls in bondage." The highest

enrichment Jesus can conceive is to have the power of bestowing life upon those who have wronged Him. He whose love constrained Him to die for men can have no purer satisfaction than this. His best recompense is to possess new facilities for inducing repentance and working salvation in the souls of those who had set Him at nought.

In virtue of what new power and authority does the exalted Prince bestow this gift? Why should He in His high estate be able to sway men more entirely to His holy will than in His life of humiliation? In converse with His contemporaries whilst still dwelling in the flesh, He could only move them through the channels of common speech, persuasion, kindness, and natural sympathy. The forces of His Divine personality had to move along the normal tracks by which mind communicates with mind. We know by experience what a hard task it is to change the thoughts and mould the lives of others. Thoreau, the great Nature-student, speaks as though the task were hopeless. "For myself, I am pliant as an osier, . . . but I am powerless to bend the character of another. He is like iron in my hand. I could tame a hyena more easily than my friend. A naked savage will fell an oak with a fire brand, and wear a hatchet out of the rock; but I cannot hew the smallest chip out of the character of my fellow to beautify or deform it." In the days of His deepest discouragement Jesus never fell into fatalism

of this dismal order; but He often felt the limitations of His methods. By redeeming men and standing as their representative at the right hand of God, He opened for Himself fresh avenues of access to the human conscience. Because He has made Himself one with men He has acquired power to suffuse them with the thoughts and high impulses of His own nature. He has been invested with authority to send and direct the Spirit who brings to men new light, new energy, new persuasion, new demonstrations of the eternal righteousness, and a new sense of sin. He can now reinforce the moral sensibilities from within, and so make repentance possible to the most obdurate. A traveller who fell into the hands of the Thibetans was stretched upon the rack to punish him for invading the forbidden land. He says that after a few hours his sufferings ceased, which was probably the symptom of incipient mortification. When his tormentors, for some undeclared reason having changed their minds, at last unbound him, the tide of life began to flow again through his veins, and it then seemed as though scores of knives were being run into his flesh. Through the gift of the Spirit, Jesus restores the lost moral consciousness to its primal keenness, and begins the process described in the Acts of the Apostles as being "pricked to the heart." Through a secret inward gift He revives the lost instinct for holiness, and prepares for the great separation between sin and the saved soul. He removes the ignorance

which had been blinding the mind, the stupor which had been settling down upon the moral senses. A wiser and better self arises, and we listen to the inward whisper and repent, even after the preaching of a fiery Baptist has failed to move us. The disciplines of earth assume new aspects of tenderness, and a lost power of feeling comes back to us from the throne of the Lord and Giver of life.

The gifts of the ascended Saviour follow a fixed order, repentance and remission of sin being indissolubly joined. There can be no remission unless it is preceded by repentance; and the converse truth is equally certain that steadfast and sincere repentance cannot fail to be followed by all the blessings of forgiveness.

Remission means the sending away of sin, and the guilt and shame of the past cannot be put out of our lives whilst we cling to the gains and covert pleasures of wrong-doing. Before a ship can get out to sea it must be loosed from its moorings. Repentance is the force which disengages the soul from the bonds by which it has been grappled to sin. Men sometimes underestimate the part filled by this grace in the work of salvation. The hearer is told of the inspired warrant he has for the exercise of faith. Jesus, it is said, has cancelled the bond against us, and all the energies of redeeming love wait to make our life a new creation. But this cheering message can do little for men who still hold on to their sins. The Bible does not prescribe

any test of the depth, the duration, or the emotional intenseness of a repentance unto life, other than practical fruit. It nowhere implies that the process of self-humiliation must occupy an appointed period of time, or that it must verify itself in a specific number of outward acts. If it is a gift it is not for us forthwith to appraise its contents. But in every man who desires peace with God there must be the recoil from sin. This is the foundation gift upon which all other gifts are placed. No miracle can effectually dismiss the sin of an impenitent man for he would soon replace the sin sent away by a new set of sins. A blind man whose sight had been restored in one of the hospitals of the East came back to the missionary in charge, and asked to be compensated for his loss of livelihood. His income as a beggar had failed, for since his restoration he could no longer appeal to the charity of the public. He prized the pittance in his alms-bowl more than the brightness and beauty of the world. Such an ingrate would have been capable of blinding himself again. And if men could be brought into a new world without repentance, they would still be found hugging the gains and pleasures of the old. To a self-satisfied transgressor forgiveness is a privation to be shunned rather than a beatitude to be wooed. Sin so perverts the vision that the Angel of Deliverance is as little welcome as the King of Terrors. Of course, the wicked man wants to escape penalty when it looms before him, but this is not the whole

of the question. Escape from penalty is only part of the great problem of remission.

Not only is a hard, stiff-necked transgressor incapable of receiving forgiveness, it would be an act of frivolous wastefulness to bestow it, exposing thereby God's government of truth, and faithfulness to contempt. To reprieve a condemned prisoner who had vowed to commit suicide once his hands were free would not be a procedure likely to command respect. That despotic bias towards evil which shuts out contrition from the heart is persistent moral suicide, and it would belittle the sacredness of Divine law to repeal the death penalty of a soul set upon evil. The love of sin must be effectually checked within us, we must know its folly, and confess its bitterness before we can receive the assured forgiveness. A bullion merchant would just as soon think of putting his bars of gold into coffin ships as God consent to bestow the blessings of a present specific forgiveness upon an impenitent nature. This gift of repentance must precede other gifts.

Repentance ushers in the remission of sins, for it is a law of this mediatorial grace that a second gift lies hidden within the first. Across the threshold we pass into a new realm of bounty. The crowned minister of redemption cannot waste His inward bequests to us by arresting their increase or disregard that struggle against wrong to which His own mercy has impelled us. He makes no idle call upon the sacred energies within us, and the power with

which He enables us to come to a better mind proves itself a repentance unto life. If a capitalist spends his resources in cutting a railway line, building viaducts, tunnelling rocks, and laying down metals, we may be sure he will put rolling-stock upon the line which has cost so much. One outlay is an earnest of the other. The first set of labours is a sign that other processes will follow when everything has been made ready. Repentance is as surely linked with remission as stars in the same constellation are bound together and co-ordinate. When one star rises above the horizon you have no doubt whatever that its companion stars will follow in due time. It has been so from the first memory of man, and it will continue to be so till heaven and earth shall pass. Repentance and the Divine forgiveness are immutably paired. It is true a man may forfeit the first gift by wilful neglect; but so long as he keeps it he has an earnest of the second. This faithful pitying Prince cannot lead men into a sorrow which has no happy issue. If He were to shut up His tender mercies from those whom He had made contrite, He would belie the end of His exaltation, and echo from His throne the mockery of those who derided the passion of His cross. Pharaoh's magicians might as well try to turn back the precession of the equinoxes as any malign power of earth or hell seek to break the long train of gifts conveyed to men from the Mediatorial throne. Remission and eternal life follow with sure march the first gift of repentance.

Abide patiently in lowliness and self-abasing sorrow, if light has not yet shone upon your soul. The day-star is behind the cloud, and will illuminate your life with favour and endless blessing. It is to make your forgiveness indisputable that Jesus has been enthroned. The remission of sins is not entrusted to an inferior and fallible ministry whose sentence may be revised and overthrown. The Spirit He sends forth from the right hand of power is commissioned to assure the contrite that condemnation is removed, and that a more benign world is smiling upon us. He is exalted to transfuse into the mourning soul His sense of the Father's love, and this is one and the same thing with an assured remission.

The fact that repentance is the gift of the exalted Saviour should give us a wholesome confidence in the better dispositions which arise within us. We must surrender ourselves bravely to the new impulses He creates. Till we reflect that there is something better than our own wisdom and virtue beneath the relentings which visit us in our more thoughtful hours, we cannot do this. Men and women are often deterred from open and articulate repentance by an unhappy mistrust of their own better natures. They are timid. The fear lest they should be numbered with those who endure but for a time, is dominant. They are haunted by the idea that they may soon repent of their repentance. They judge themselves to be wanting in the force which can make repentance complete, decisive, life-long. Does not this hesita-

tion imply either forgetfulness, or distrust of the character of the exalted Prince? Do not put it down to the credit of a virtuous diffidence. Remember Christ's gift creates this better mind to which you are inclining, and the gift will not vanish like the pot of faery gold once supposed to lie at the foot of the rainbow.

If Peter's words are true, a Divine energy is immanent in this better temper which is possessing you. It is, of course, possible for a man to regret ill-judged and unprofitable conduct for much the same reason as he regrets an unprofitable investment, and in such a temper at first there may not be much that is Divine. If vexation for the past stops at the question of personal loss, it is purely human and comes without an unearthly inspiration. But when there is regret for the sin itself rather than mere mortification because of the consequences, an inward recoil from what is sordid and unclean, an instinctive solicitation of better things, this is without doubt the Saviour's gift within you. Do not mistrust it. An unworthy prince is he who would let the friends he has enriched with pearls pass defenceless from the palace vestibule into bands of robbers. The Prince who is at God's right hand will make the ways safe which pass from the throne where He bestows His bounties into the common world. He will guard His own gift within you. The power of His throne, and of the sons of light who wait there, is behind the gifts He reaches out to contrite worshippers.

If the gifts of repentance and remission can be lightly snatched away from us, the very motive of the exalted estate to which Jesus has been upraised suffers defeat. The forces of the Supreme King are with the penitent in His struggle towards better things. If the virtue of Christ's sovereignty enters into our penitence and vitalises our faith, there is no foulness which it cannot cleanse, no bondage it cannot break, no burden of wrath from which it cannot free, no destiny for which it cannot fit. You have no power to mourn and cast off your sins? Then is this lofty throne towards which Peter looked a faded pageant. You are helpless to be other than you are? Then the Holy One has seen corruption and His dust lies in some forgotten grave. You dare not hope for recovery to that sacred image in which you were made? Then this coronation of which apostles spake is a piece of stage fiction. There is no sure absolution for such as you? Then the Ascension is a myth and the disciples who professed to witness it were diseased hypnotics. If the history is true in its bare facts and in its first interpretation, there can be no defeat for this redemptive government. The vital interaction of seed and sun does not fail, but has verified itself through long cycles of time; and the interaction between the exalted Son and the contrite spirits of earth is just as sure. Almighty power has put Jesus Christ upon the throne to enable you and me to turn from sin and live in the Divine favour; and this

sublimest of all God's economies cannot be brought to nought. Repentance and remission are no illusive gifts for the humble souls who wait to receive. The Saviour's majestic kingship is bound up with the sure enrichment of those who are poor in spirit. The world, the flesh, and the devil abet your earthly leanings, and terrible forces for mischief they are, but they are weaker than the throne where Jesus is seated to help at all times the spirit of repentance and the process of your restoration.

How are we to discover, appropriate, and develop these gifts? How do we deal with natural gifts—the gift for painting, for music, or for art? We feel an undefined aspiration stirring within us. Either suddenly, or by imperceptible degrees, a strong desire takes possession of our minds. Perhaps a friend encourages us to believe that we possess a gift, or it may be some crisis in our life compels us to put ourselves to the test. And then we increase our confidence in the gift by continuing to use it. No child is born a Titian, a Beethoven, or a Robert Browning. A lad takes a bit of chalk and tries his hand, and keeps on trying for years, with the persuasion that he will do something in due time. He gets hold of a flute or a violin from the attic, and essays a few simple chords, and his love for the pursuit deepens, whilst perhaps neighbours ridicule. But the gift at length becomes as distinct as a sunrise. A child-poet finds rhythmic sentences haunting his ear, and he writes and burns, writes

and prunes, and keeps on writing, till at last the voice of a new singer is heard in the land. The faculty is not brought out of emptiness. There must be something to start with, but even then the gift would count for little without diligent toil. And in all of us there is Christ's beginning—a secret breath upon our innermost life, a Divine throb. Perhaps the message of the preacher reminds us of the untrained gift, or we have a sense of it in our silent hours, or we have found it out under some stress that has come to us. But the gift must be used, for spiritual as well as natural endowments may be lost. There are faint beginnings within us which may become more specific and defined each day we live; or which, on the other hand, may disappear. Tens of thousands of men live in spiritual vacuity and impotence, because they disobey the influences which announce these gifts. Do not let us ignore or forget our unworked endowments. They have left their prints upon the past consciousness.

How often is this twofold gift despised, or looked upon as a vague reversion! If the neglect continues, it will be to our eternal undoing. A common incident sometimes shapes itself into a parable of unused gifts. Two brothers in a village of the Far East part under the shadow of a misunderstanding, one of them going away to the jade mines of Turkestan, where he finds riches; and the other remaining at home to till the ancestral fields. The jade merchant, in the course of years, meets a fellow-clansman who

is returning to his native village, and, wishing to wipe out the old estrangement, sends to his brother, and to each child of his brother's household, faultless pieces of the much-prized stone, the value of which would buy the ancestral lands ten times over. The clansman discharges the trust committed to him with fidelity, and for the time nothing more is heard of this act of good-will. After the lapse of years a famine ravages the province in which the old home stands, and thousands of even the well-to-do perish by the dire visitation. His brother, and the household of which he is head, are numbered with the victims. Years pass by, and the merchant, who has been beyond the zone of the calamity, returns to visit his friends. The house is silent, the couches unoccupied, and furniture and doorways are cobwebbed. When the last death had taken place, the neighbours sealed up the house and its possessions, till such time as the family representative should return. In looking through the effects, this elder brother finds in a neglected chest the packet he had addressed with his own hand, certified with his own seal, and forwarded across the great desert by a trusty friend. He to whom it was sent was too proud to be reconciled, and had perhaps so little trust in his brother's goodwill, that he did not dream the familiar handwriting covered gifts which would have saved from famine and death. Does not the incident speak to us? Pride, suspicion, ill-will, blind us to the gifts of Him who is our Elder Brother and the great Prince of

Heaven. We perish through failure to trust Him, and make His hidden gifts our own. "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?"

"God having raised up His Son Jesus, hath sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities."

XVII.

THE UNALTERABLE GOSPEL.

"But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."—GALATIANS i. 8.

IT is instructive to note how in the new man, Paul the apostle, traits of the earlier personality reappear, chastened and sanctified. The epistle before us affords proof that, apart from the grace of God, he must have been the zealous persecutor described in the book of Acts. He is still a dogmatist, although his creed is made up of simple articles, and his insistent temper has nobler motives behind it than in the days of his youth and opening manhood. Attempts to dilute the evangelical faith amongst the churches of Galatia roused his resentment and uncompromising antagonism. Many sentences of this letter illustrate the sternness and the massive strength which still persist in this extraordinary man. His words are fierce, weighty, crushing.

In the apostle's view, the revival of Jewish tradition which has unsettled these converts, strikes at the very root of the evangel. Those obsolete rites

which were finding favour amongst many, could only thrive where there was declining loyalty to the essential doctrines of grace, and could not therefore be regarded as trifles which might well be left to personal taste only. These Galatian tendencies would sooner or later involve grave issues of conduct, and the apostle views them with the same kind of indignation as the moral delinquencies which in other places so often threatened to blight his work. His voice is startling as the blast of a trumpet. It is impossible to exaggerate his sense of the crisis to which they have brought themselves by their restlessness and inconstancy. Jewish rites, adopted by those who were not bound to them by birth, resuscitate the temper of superstition, foster religious pride, and obscure the freeness of that mercy which is the only hope of mankind.

But what a difference from bygone days! To these attendants upon his missionary ministry, with whom he was once on such cordial terms, he speaks strongly and even roughly. And yet it is evident that his nature has been changed, that he is trusting to new and more persuasive forces, that he could not now persecute even on the side which has enlisted his utmost zeal. Not only is his soul too tender, gentle, compassionate for such methods, but the haunting memory of all that he had done against unoffending disciples makes him recoil from the argument of the inquisitor. This closed chapter

of his history he mourned with a sustained bitterness which effectually prevented any repetition of its methods.

His fealty was now transferred from a visible to an invisible centre, and the entire groundwork of his action was changed. He had stepped forth upon his early crusades of violence and fanaticism to vindicate the prestige of a religious council. Now be asserts that all human authority, though it be even that of the apostles themselves, is of less account than the authority which is enthroned in a living Gospel. Wherever the truth of redemption is rightly proclaimed, it will vindicate itself, and needs neither rod nor scourge, lance nor fetter, to enforce it. The faith against which he once contended with the weapons of the tyrant was the faith of tradition; that for which he now lifts up an unfaltering voice is the faith that roots itself in the living, collective experiences of a believing brotherhood.

As a witness to his Lord, and a lover of the souls brought into peril, he pronounces God's anathema against the man who tampers with this Gospel of inviolable sacredness, making it of none effect through unlicensed accretions. It is the old zealot who speaks, sanctified by the Spirit of the cross, and informed and inspired by a guidance which is from above. The jealousy he feels for the honour of his redeeming Lord, and eager solicitude for the spiritual welfare of his fellows, kindle a

passion intenser than that of his earthly vehemence. In a peril from which there is only one outlet it may be profound kindness to seem intolerant, and complaisance to the caprices of those in jeopardy implies a heart of stone. The anathema forms a part of the Gospel as well as of the law, and if one man more than another provokes its downfall, it is the man who perverts the innermost mystery of that message of grace in which all hope centres.

Paul saw that the Gospel could not admit of variation and yet retain its efficacy for many reasons. (1) The problem with which it was seeking to grapple was so difficult as to admit of only one solution. (2) The agencies established to deal with that problem were of an unprecedented character. (3) A sure method of salvation must be free from ambiguity, and have no part with competing methods. (4) All the experiences of contemporary believers pointed to a solitary Gospel of redemption from sin.

1. IT IS ALWAYS THE MARK OF A CRITICAL STAGE IN THE HISTORY WHEN THE WAYS OF ESCAPE ARE RIGIDLY LIMITED IN NUMBER. The most distressing diseases are not those for which antidotes grow in every hedgerow. Grave consequences are pending, if we are told that we must not vary by a hair's breadth from the instructions laid down. The most appalling situations in life are not those from which we may flee through many doors. The graver the complications that

face us, the fewer the feasible schemes of salvation from their cruel entanglement. And such common analogies have their special application to the subject of sin. It is a thing so woeful, disastrous, appalling, that we may well wonder if there be any chance of redemption from it, and average human nature feels more or less of incredulity, when the story of human redemption is first told. If redemption is possible, it is inconceivable that it should be by a score of expedients, one equally good with another. There are worlds into which sin has come, from which, as far as we know, it cannot possibly be stamped out. It has seized upon wise and mighty beings, as leprosy sometimes riots in its hideous power over the wearer of a crown; and through all the ages there is no apparent hope of release from its cruel clutches. Such an evil, which seems to have breathed its irreparable blight upon other worlds before alighting upon our own, cannot be dealt with by any makeshift process man can devise. Human governments when organised to suppress its outbreaks in social life find themselves mocked and discredited by its tenacious insidiousness. It is an assault upon the supremacy of the Divine holiness, and here, above all other things, we must wait to know the will of God, and take the pathway of escape His hand points out. If there be no Divine revelation, the problem is hopeless; and when the revelation of free mercy has once been made, the least departure from it is a sacrilege

against God, and an offence against the hope and welfare of the race, for which crime is too light a name. The indignation felt by the apostle is akin to that which the head of a household might feel if an untrained nurse were to interpose at the moment the doctor has the life of a beloved child in his hand; such as the head of a State Department would feel if some ignorant sub-contractor were to modify the specifications for a bridge prepared by the best engineering skill of the time. Irresponsible modification is homicide. To alter is to destroy.

2. As Paul viewed this subject, AN INFINITE AND ETERNAL WISDOM WAS NEEDED TO DESIGN THE PROCESS OF ESCAPE, AND AN UNHEARD-OF MUNIFICENCE OF LOVE TO CARRY IT INTO EFFECT. Again and again Paul affirms that this root-conception of the Gospel was hidden away in the deeps of the Godhead, that the angels could not explore the secret, and that it was only after many ages that the gracious redeeming mystery took efficacious shape in the work of Jesus Christ. If this be so, any alternative man may devise for himself must be a paltry, disappointing juggle.

But it needed also infinite and unblemished love to apply these redemptive counsels to the problem of human guilt. One was designated as the instrument and messenger of this great salvation who bore a birthmark distinguishing Him from all others, for He was the only begotten Son of the Father. No other hand than His could touch the tremendous

problem. Ransom from the guilt and thraldom of sin by self-surrender to death of the Holy One of God is an idea that makes a vast claim upon our faith, but the different parts of the story are consistent with each other; and to give colour to the idea that man could carry out any essential part of the redemptive work himself was to exchange consistency for incoherence and subsequent mortification. Could another enter into the peculiar work of Him who came down from heaven out of the bosom of the Father, or supplement the achievements of His sacred passion? God would not surely have sent His Son, if man, either before or after conversion, could have contributed to the expiation of his own sin; and when Jewish rites are once revived and re-established, or rites having any corresponding import, the story of redemption resolves itself into a frivolous fable. The work of the cross is altogether Divine, or altogether human; but cannot be a compound of the two. The salvation from sin proclaimed in the Gospel is so unapproachably august that in Paul's judgment there could not be any variation of its substance. Its virtues were inimitable.

This reversion to a religion of punctilious rites put upon selfish man the task of redeeming himself by a service of unselfishness, a service possible only to infinite love. It was utterly inconceivable that petty, sordid, vain-glorious Pharisaisms could have such propitiatory value as attached to the eternal and unspotted righteousness which offered itself on the

cross for man's sin. Vain dream that the doors which immure the human race in wrath and condemnation will open to a key fashioned by the toil and skill of the captives within the walls. The gates of brass and bars of iron will fly back only before the presence of Him who carries the keys of death and hades. Such keys have no duplicates, and the material from which to fashion them is found in no earthly mine. As well might the life-sentence prisoner in the most redoubtable fortress of Europe try to pick the steel locks between him and his home with straws. The qualities do not inhere in human character which will make man strong to deal with the faintest of his offences against the law, the person, and the character of God. The Gospel is intolerant of either specious imitations or auxiliary rituals to eke out its virtues. It is all of a piece, and comes down from heaven. Of course, the Gospel is found in a setting of earthly thought and phrase, but its vital principles are purely Divine.

3. THIS NOTE OF EXCLUSIVENESS IN THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL IS INTENDED TO MAKE SALVATION SURE FOR THOSE WHO SEEK IT. In travelling through thinly settled countries or amongst people of a strange language, we know how much easier progress is if there are no cross-roads. The ideal city of refuge is approached by one path in which the simple of heart cannot err. It might as well be a dungeon of darkness or an execution ground of Divine judgments, if approached by a maze of byeways laid out apparently with the

design of baffling the fugitive. There is only one true way into the kingdom, one solitary method of salvation, one effectual remedy for human sin and woe; and it is in wisdom and mercy that God has stamped the Gospel as a thing apart to which there can be no rival. It is for the very purpose of delivering us from perplexity that the Christian religion reserves its emphasis for a limited number of primary and essential truths. It puts some facts into the pathway of a brilliant search-light, and leaves others in comparative obscurity. In many directions it allows the utmost freedom and latitude of thought. The New Testament does not pronounce upon one tithe of the questions we should like to have settled for us, and which ecclesiastics and theologians sometimes presume to settle in the name of the Most High; and it maintains this note of reserve to save us from distraction. Any departure from this method would tend to tone down the significance of culminating redemption truths. Where it is consonant with spiritual well-being, apostolic Christianity allows wide rights of private judgment, and does not weaken or complicate its own testimony to essentials.

We meet at times with men more boisterous in temperament than delicate in judicial sense, who talk in superlatives and waste inordinate emphasis upon common-place things, and they make little impression. Nobody listens, not a heart is stirred,

for the high-pitched note has become monotonous and meaningless. The reading or recitation is only too familiar which begins, continues, and ends in a paroxysm, and it is hard to say when the high tide of interest is reached. The Bible never makes such inartistic mistakes. It is most scrupulous in its distribution of light and shade. We know at once what truths it means to accentuate into supreme significance, and what truths it accounts subordinate only. In setting forth the chief doctrines of grace it gives no uncertain or misleading sound, permitting no divergence from what is essential, and guarding in every possible way all that belongs to the vital substance of the evangel. Peter is at one with his "beloved brother Paul" in asserting that "Neither is there salvation in any other."

4. THE TESTS OF EXPERIENCE SINGLE OUT THE GOSPEL FOR ITS PLACE OF UNRIVALLED AUTHORITY IN DEALING WITH THE MORAL MALADY OF HUMAN NATURE. Paul might well have appealed to his own religious history in proof of the finality of the message he had preached to the Galatians. His life covered both sides of the question raised by these innovations which were disturbing the churches. He could revert to a period in which he had tried with exhaustive thoroughness the Jewish observances by which the Gospel preached to the Galatians had been recently adulterated, and the results in his own case were barren; and he could revert to a later chapter in his biography

when a pure and an uncompounded Gospel began to vindicate its benign and incomparable power. He had tried the ritual of which circumcision was the initiatory pledge and the outward sign; and the character produced under this traditional cult was hard, ferocious, remorseful—little better than that of the despised Gentile. His fastidious formalities had left him self-centred, pitiless, a persecutor of the unoffending Church of Jesus. And his experience in the religion of the letter was sufficient to cover all the gospels which the best types of Paganism might present to the world, for these gospels were cruder forms of justification by the works of a less perfect law than that of Judaism. And this other gospel, which was no gospel, had left him under condemnation, ready to be smitten to the ground by a Divine reproach which vocalised itself in the noonday heavens. Indeed, the appeal of Jesus, persecuted in the person of His followers, was overwhelming, because it came home to a self-accusing conscience. Paul's remoter past was a sufficient proof that the rule of life he had practised with so much zeal was no gospel. But the Gospel he had been preaching within recent years had left a different record in his history. It had created a new heaven and earth for his habitation and enfibred his nature with new virtues. From reproaches, stinging almost to madness, he had found escape, and the life he now lived by the faith of the Son of God was gentle, tender-hearted, meek, forbearing, rich in unselfishness. From this final truth of

religion he could not move a hair's breadth without losing harmony between himself and God, forfeiting his persuasion of the Divine favour and good-will; and depressing the motive-forces upon which all advancement of character turned. The Gospel that had introduced itself into his life was no vague, fluctuating, optimistic dream of a half-reconciled Deity, but a clearly defined fact with a specific interpretation, from which there must be no iota of variation. To change the character of the evangel is to destroy the core of its life, and to strain, perhaps to snap, the mainspring that energised it to wonderful issues. And his own experience with all its illuminating lessons had been reproduced at one time within his converts. If they would but weigh the past the same conclusions would follow. "The Gospel which I preached and ye also received." By their faith as recipients they had come to know what was the Gospel and what was not, as unerringly as Paul himself. Whilst in its first approaches to the human heart the Gospel is dependent for a time upon its advocates and witnesses, it soon becomes self-attesting truth and power. Its authority is intrinsic and ceases to be distinctively external. A healthy and whole-hearted personal experience ought to be effectual in filtering out from the Gospel that saves us admixtures of those evil elements abroad in the world, which threaten to abate its power and destroy its vitalising principles.

The words of the text imply that *The Gospel is greater than its greatest witnesses.* It bears its own

credentials, and, in the end, depends upon neither human nor angelic authority to commend it. It is more majestic than its most august messengers, and less open to the influences which pervert, for is it not the power of God unto salvation? Upon what does religious faith rest? is a momentous and ever-recurring question in the present day. In the thousand and one things of our common life where direct personal knowledge is scarcely accessible, we weigh name against name. Men often try to solve their political controversies by the lists of adherents that can be arrayed on the one or the other side. Most points in science are submitted to the same test. The attitude of the lay mind towards evolution is ruled by an informal census of experts. Contributors to modern literature ask for a Sanhedrim of contemporary authors, to be convoked under Royal Charter, for settling obscure points of grammar and pronunciation with a competence that will be final. Religions are sometimes venerated or decried according to the same rule. Buddhism claims, although by a somewhat promiscuous arithmetic, that it holds sway over a third of the human race, and is therefore the sovereign faith. A special sanctity attaches to the office of the Pope at Rome, because the adherents of the Latin form of Christianity outnumber the Protestants. And Protestants in their turn claim that heads must be weighed as well as counted. Our faith is demanded because spiritual authority has been centralised and finds

its mouthpiece in the Roman Church; and again we are told that apostolic authority has its fountain-head in a number of bishops who are in the true succession. In his Oxford days John Henry Newman complained that Roman Catholics made so little of the early Fathers, and unduly revered the reigning Pontiff and his subordinate officials; and in his Birmingham Oratory days that distinguished man reversed the tenour of his lamentation. Protestants, he declared, made too much of the Fathers of the first three centuries, and too little of the occupant of St Peter's chair. Such methods of argument would have had little or no support from St Paul. We sometimes find him appealing to the gratitude of his converts, but never to the historic continuity of his office. He implies that we must test churches, councils, societies for Christian teaching, which claim authority over us, by their accord with the first elements of the apostolic message. Those teachers alone have the right to guide and instruct us, who assert without change the foundation truths which have justified and renewed us. We must not go to ecclesiastical courts to find out what is truth, but must use the truth which is within us and has made us free, to find out whether those in office over us, or seeking that distinction, are worthy of the power they wield. The twelve apostles themselves are incompetent to give any kind of validity to a statement which errs from evangelical truth. A member

of the Royal College of Physicians cannot turn corrosive sublimate into quinine by force of his authority; no, not if he had a house full of medals and diplomas. An error in the lips of an angel from heaven is an error still — perhaps an error with a thousandfold power of mischief in it, because of the authority which promulgates it. It is the message by which you must judge the messenger, not the plumage of his wings.

After all, the idea of apostle or angel preaching another Gospel is no fantastic supposition, for the peril is not beyond all bounds of possibility. We cannot with any show of respect for facts, assume that a Church organised in a particular way and brought into a specific historic relation with the Church founded by the apostles, is necessarily and permanently infallible. Churches answering all the external tests laid down, have sometimes diluted the truth which saves, or held it in forms from which the power has fled. A dead orthodoxy is a phenomenon with which the world has sometimes been familiar for generations. In the words before us the apostle allows that he himself might become unfaithful to the truth with which he had been put in trust; indeed, he could not fail in character without failing in office likewise. He boldly affirms that "an angel from heaven" could not make a distorted Gospel binding upon human faith, or clothe it with the saving efficacy of the original Gospel. Angels have left their first estate, and the winged messenger

John saw flying through the firmament might conceivably prove faithless as his fellows, and forget the commission received from God's throne. Orders are not indelible when he who bears them becomes apostate. We live in a fallible universe, and if an angel may lose the warmth of his new-born love, and the clearness of his first discernment, why not a church of mortals in spite of the marks of apostolicity stamped upon its customs and its organisation? The continuity of pure and unadulterated truth cannot be proved by lists of names, however illustrious, even though the lists contain that of Gabriel himself.

We must test the authorities claiming to direct our faith by the truth which the Spirit has put within us, and never dream of testing the truth by the authority which inculcates it, or the names that may be quoted on its side. No college or conclave can be trusted to prove the evangel in our stead, and we disclaim personal responsibility at our peril. The Church and its ministries may be worthy of reverence, but for another to prescribe what we are to believe is a species of theological feudalism that an educated and a serious age will at last reject. We must test everything by the Gospel word which is ever coming afresh to the hearts of men in saving and renewing power, and when it ceases so to come, we may fall back upon authorities. When the Gospel has once cast its benign spell upon your nature that which is of the essence of its teaching, which brings

peace, disburdenment, victory over sin, the promise of a sanctity sweet and lustrous as buds opened overnight must never be changed. Let it be inviolable to the day of your death. You have sufficient scope for your reason in the outlying truths of the faith. Let this experience, which did not come to you by natural reason, stand apart, holy, God-sealed, changeless. It is the one Gospel which is the foundation of the one baptism and the one Church, and the order does not lend itself to inversion. In every age this is the Gospel which is the power of God to salvation in every believing soul.

But the question arises, How does this assertion of the fixity of the Gospel consist with the development of Christianity? Our faith surely is a living organism, and as such must have room to expand. Religious writers of perfectly orthodox schools speak of a growth in the theology of St Paul, and set themselves to trace its stages. It is a part of the providential order that the childish way of apprehending things should give place to the more mature and comprehensive. If the Gospel does not permit its doctrines to be altered by one jot or tittle, is not faith sure to be stereotyped? In speaking of an unalterable Gospel, the apostle obviously has in mind the central truths which determine faith and guide into conscious salvation. His own teaching sometimes touched subjects which were of temporary expediency, and were not, perhaps, of front-rank importance. We may divide the truths of the

Christian religion into three classes—central, intermediate, and outlying truths. There are two or three foundation truths which directly commend themselves to the conscience, such as sin, redemption, judgment. These are the innermost truths of faith, and Paul would probably have limited the term Gospel to these elements. They are incorporated into the two sacraments, and have a monumental significance in the Church of Jesus. These sacraments were a compact creed which preceded that commonly called the apostles'. They may admit of fresh statements which will carry a higher illumination to the intellect, of wider applications in human life, of new analogies furnished from the fresh provinces of human knowledge, but they are practically changeless. These keynotes ruled all the developments of Paul's own theology. But the Christian religion contains many secondary truths, to the statement of which the human judgment, not, of course, apart from the guidance of the Divine Spirit, has contributed. They are matters of inference, inevitable inference it seems to many of us; but they are not of the essence of the Gospel, although they may even find a place in our catechisms and formularies. They are, perhaps, necessary to the man whose reason has been trained, but they do not immediately attest themselves to the conscience. And then there are also Christian doctrines into the expression of which a certain element of speculation enters. These are outlying subjects

at the circumference of evangelical thought—subjects, it may be, incidentally referred to in the sacred Scriptures, but not essential parts of that good news of salvation which delivers men. The foundation truths which save operate immediately upon the conscience, and are unalterable. Addressed to the permanent needs of human nature in every age, they would lose their relevance if they were to be inverted or varied. Superstitions which do not involve a direct denial of the message of the Gospel may obscure and supersede it. Rites of human appointment may be so cumbersome and exacting that they will crush the life-breath out of our evangelical creed, without directly assailing it. In our contemplation of some of the more obscure aspects of religion we may at times grow so absorbed as to forget the simple facts which constitute the good news from God. It is possible for the line of gravity to fall outside the elaborations added to the original fabric. We need to come back to the first things set forth in "the bairn's hymns," which a dying minister of the truth wished to hear. When the Gospel has once proved its power in us, our faith should rest no longer upon the man who first announced it to us, but upon the power of God itself.

XVIII.

THE NEMESIS OF EXCLUSIVENESS.

"Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved; to fill up their sins alway; but the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost."—1 THESSALONIANS ii. 16.

ST PAUL is here reminding his converts of a striking parallel between the difficulties encountered in Judea and in Thessalonica at the first preaching of the Christian religion. The intolerant temper which slew Jesus and the prophets, and scattered abroad the first generation of His followers, was at work in all parts of the known world. The rage and jealousy fomented at the capital went to incredible lengths; and the Jew, not content with opposing the message of the Gospel, in fatherland and in far-off settlement alike, bitterly resented the preaching of any doctrine which was a development of the Mosaic creed to those even who were of Gentile blood. The apostle asserts that this exclusive temper is an exhibition of virulent wickedness, and brings upon itself, in due time, an overwhelming doom.

And this temper is not yet dead, but exists in both covert and open forms. There are those amongst

us, still tenacious perhaps of their right to the Christian name, who would close again, if possible, the great and effectual doors opened within recent years for the preaching of the Gospel. They go to church, and in some cases, perhaps, receive the sacraments, but in this respect they are entire strangers to the spirit and meaning of the religion they profess to follow. It may be they think religion is racial rather than cosmopolitan. The policy they avow is dictated by a spurious patriotism, and a hectic passion for empire. They have wider views of the flag than of the cross, and are more zealous to plant the one in new territory than the other. The missionary they look upon as a disturbing element in native life. They are enthusiasts for commerce, and think the apostle of a meddlesome Puritanism a barrier against some kinds of commerce; and perhaps they are right. Cases are not unknown in which the trader or the diplomatist is jealous of the wholesome influence acquired by the preacher of the Christian faith. The person who exploits the native, does not always appreciate the equalising tendency of the Gospel, and likes to keep up a line of strong demarcation between the more favoured and the less favoured races. Sometimes this anti-evangelistic temper is not acute enough to be aggressive, but it shows itself in less pronounced phases. Many who have no wish to close doors already opened, are too careless and indifferent to enter through those doors, and prepare Christ's way amongst the Gentiles; and the right

of way lapses through disuse. It often happens, however, that this indifference passes into active opposition, because it is difficult for many natures to continue neutral. Christianity compels men in the long run either to love or to loathe it. This temper which would keep back the Gospel from others, betokens a moribund Christianity, as it was once the symptom of a decadent Judaism.

A SPECIOUS AND IGNOBLE PATRIOTISM MAY SOMETIMES THRUST RELIGION FROM ITS CHIEF PLACE IN THE MIND OF GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE. This is not an uncommon cause of that repressive policy which is a sure note of apostacy. The leaders at Jerusalem, and their allies in the far-off colonies of the Roman empire, had come to look upon the existence of the Israelitish race as an end in itself, rather than as a means of giving a Saviour to the world. The teaching and death of Jesus had divided the race into factions, and it seemed treachery to the tradition of providential centuries to suffer those factions to multiply. Such schisms should surely be kept within the privacy of domestic life, and not announced far and near. The first duty of Jewish patriots was to hold together, and this could scarcely be done if the followers of the Nazarene were to win promiscuous Gentiles to their cause. God and the law and the prophets must be left on one side for the moment; such, at least, was the secret thought, although few perhaps might be bold enough to say it. Unless

Judaism is to disappear, it needs to present a united front to the world. These wandering preachers were ill-advised adventurers, friends of every country but their own, insurrectionists, asserting the name and authority of one who, according to official allegations, was a rival to Cæsar. There must be quiet stability, an undisturbed tenure of their privileges as traders; and to transplant religious controversies from Jerusalem to Thessalonica and other cities, was to discredit the chosen race, and to challenge the persecution of the world.

This is what the representatives of nominally Christian governments in foreign lands sometimes say at the present time. They do not care to have the diplomatic atmosphere disturbed by the cry of the evangelist. Perhaps they venture to interdict the man who wants to preach the Gospel in the regions beyond, and assume that they in their gold lace must interpret the scope of the commission the apostle they hector has received from Jesus Christ. Whilst the missionary, no less than the every-day disciple, must live peaceably with all men, as much as in him lieth, it is intolerable that a commission from God should be *viséd* by a Don Juan of a consul, or flung back in his face by a district magistrate, who dropped his last vestige of Christian morality twenty years ago. In other words, the claim of Christ's kingdom must be supreme, and the plea of patriotism subordinate to it. Where righteousness rules the civil administration, Christ's messenger will

be no ruffler of the civic peace; and where it is set at nought, the sooner the *régime* is disturbed and provoked to reform, the better for all concerned. When a policy of repression is attempted or enforced, we may justly suspect that the patriotism which dictates it is godless and ill-fated.

Politicians are only too common who seem to think that the British flag has been carried over acres of trampled and mutilated lives in every part of the world to make markets for rum, opium, Manchester shirtings; to prepare the way for emigrants who do not come; to set up proprietary rights in other men's gold, ruby, and diamond mines; to enable native tribes to cast their bows and assegais to moles and bats, and shoulder the rifle. It is not many years since the liberality of London merchants was evoked for a college in Khartoum to be called after the great soldier-saint who died there, but from which, in deference to Moslem prejudice, the teaching of Christianity was to be excluded. There was no proposal, however, to make the district a liquor prohibition area; and the rum and brandy carried under our flag to every part of the world is a greater offence to the Moslem than the cross. Indeed, the cross owes as much of the discredit into which it has fallen amongst the followers of the Arabian prophet to the drinking habits of the Englishman, as to the feuds bred by the wars of the Crusaders. Judging by appearances we might build up a plausible argument to show that the British empire has

grown up under the patronage of a smiling devil to promote commerce in wickedness. Deplorable results always follow when we allow the idea of patriotism to precede that of the Divine righteousness. Some of us believe that the empire exists by the providence of God to open doors to the Gospel in every part of the world, to send out through dreary tracts of barbarism streams of pure blessing rather than of poison and bitter cursing. Our empire is not an end in itself but a means to the most glorious and unselfish of all ends—the promotion of the kingdom of God amongst men. He who subordinates the evangel to the expediencies of a sordid statecraft is a close copyist of the intolerant Jews denounced by St Paul, and runs a risk of being gathered with them in the day of doom.

IN THIS POLICY OF REPRESSION ADOPTED TOWARDS THE APOSTLES AND THEIR PREACHING, MAY WE NOT SEE THE RESENTMENT OF THE JEWS AGAINST THE SETTING UP OF AN INFORMAL COURT OF APPEAL, WHICH WOULD BE SURE TO CONDEMN THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND THE RULERS BEFORE THE EYES OF THE GENTILES? The first evangelists could not exalt Jesus Christ without discrediting thereby those who had slain Him. The Jew of every age is far-sighted, and to his lucid common sense it was obvious that the message of salvation by the cross must necessarily result in showing up the infamies of those who had nailed to it a prophet of God. If Paul magnified the name

of One whom the courts at Jerusalem had sentenced and crucified, all racial self-respect would be lost and the credit of the nation in the esteem of the Greeks would be irretrievably impaired. To speak of the resurrection was to declare that the Jewish authorities were by no means infallible, and that God had mocked their verdict and vindicated His Son. Apostolic preaching arraigned the policy of the past, arraigned it so that men having been convinced of sin might receive in God's name an assured forgiveness for this unexampled crime. The death of Jesus at the hands of his own countrymen was a fact that struck at the very root of national pride, and made self-righteousness a piece of ridiculous imposture. No Jew could look upon such a prospect with composure. It took away his good name in the presence of the Gentile world and toppled sanctimonious pretence into the mire.

And a similar motive operates still. Amongst many who speak bitterly of Christian missionaries and their work, there are often currents of adverse feeling of which the public ought to know. It is not the rule, but rather the exception, for the Englishman, nominally Christian, to observe the laws of his religion in the tropics; and he does not care for the light and restraining influence of Gospel teaching to follow his steps, much less for the native to discover how far he lives below the profession of faith current in his fatherland. The first thing a heathen man does with the Gospel when he has heard it is to weigh

up the white merchant, the consul, the sea-captain in its tell-truth scales; and the first thing the man who is the victim of this humiliating operation does is to call down shame upon the missionary who has taught the native to be impudent, and to forget his subordinate place in the scheme of anthropology. Of course, it is not pleasant for the Oriental merchant to begin talking to the shady European in the bazaar about the golden rule and its commercial applications. From such a man's standpoint the missionary spoils the native and robs him of his natural virtues. Trade tricks, the traffic in liquor and pernicious drugs, the import of unseemly pictures and photographs, the connivance of military officials at the basest forms of slavery, whilst they are sent to uphold a flag which is supposed to give sanctuary to the slave, are topics which had better be considered apart from The Sermon on the Mount. How insolent for the half-taught native to become the judge of his superior and pose as a censor of our wars, our drinking habits, our adulteries and adulterations, upon the strength of some small smattering of truth he has picked up from a missionary! A bit of light has got in and the great merchant is no longer a paragon of wisdom, little less than a god, but a culprit and a pretender. Christianity wherever it is preached sets up a new tribunal, and this is not always congenial. Where a missionary is hand and glove with the official representatives of our empire and sees nothing to rebuke or amend, you may be sure that either one

of two things has happened—he has given his cause away and been bribed into adulation by patronage and grants of land, or the British empire is represented by saints.

AN UNHOLY SCORN OF THE CAPABILITIES OF THE GENTILE RACES ADDED VIRULENCE TO THIS PROGRAMME OF REPRESSION. The policy would have been discontinued apart from the wicked rancour and pride which were underneath it. These Jews begrudged their Gentile neighbours any kind of interest or participation in a movement which they regarded as an erratic development of the religion of their forefathers. They were frenzied by the idea that the crumbs of a Gospel feast, which they themselves had slighted and declined, should be bestowed upon the uncircumcised dogs. It was insufferable that these Macedonians should become recipients of the cast-off clothes of the chosen people. The faith of Jesus, corrupt as it might be from their standpoint, was much too good for these reprobate worshippers of images. If once leavened by it they might claim to be on a par with the children of Abraham and speak of God as their common Father—an issue which would stultify the Jews' special position of privilege. The religion of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, even in its most degenerate forms, was too sacred to be treated thus. Non-elect Gentiles might well be content with something inferior even to the vapourings of the Galileans. Such an attitude

of mind was not only ungracious in itself, but a clear proof that their reverence for the Old Testament Scriptures was not all it seemed.

And these Jews of the prohibitive and persecuting tradition have descendants in our own century, curious, unread, nominal Christians, with little or no pity for the ignorance and woe of the Gentile world, or at least who affect to think that Christianity is not exactly the remedy it needs. Less pure religion may serve the purpose for a time. That man is deficient in the altruism which is the sinew of high spiritual philanthropy, who thinks that Brahmanism, Buddhism, Parseeism, Islamism, and even fetish-worship are good enough for the second and third rate races of the world. Of course, these second and third rate races are useful for commercial, military, and domestic purposes. They excel as ivory hunters, or collectors of rubber in tropical forests, and are conspicuous for strength when engaged as burden bearers for the explorer and for the invading army. They are a part of the organised industrial system of the world and can hammer bronzes, polish lacquers, plait straw, mould quaint pottery, paint Satsuma ware, and fill our homes with curios we could not afford to buy if they were made at home. These non-Christian races form a reserve fund of cheap labour upon which we may be compelled to draw. It is always profitable for the governing races to be surrounded with races just a little less cunning and a trifle less informed

about the market value of the wares they have to sell. In some instances these non-Christian races may have a genius for art, literature, engineering, and may be consummate gardeners, and fish cultivators who anticipated Frank Buckland by centuries; but their capacity for religion is not of the same dimension as ours, and their spiritual, like their natural life, must follow the rule of the country in which they were born and bred. To try feeding rice, yam, and millet eaters with the manna sent down from heaven is a meddlesome and foolish inversion of the appointed order. Nature meant them to walk in the ways of their forefathers, world without end; which is to say in less roundabout terms, God has predestinated them to a home life less pure and sacred than our own, and to a social and religious bondage incompatable with that gracious freedom which is our glory and crown. It is substantially the old argument of the slave-holder who was casting about for a religious basis to his rights of property. Let it be clearly understood that the man who discourages missions to those who are in darkness, whether he be the rigid Jew in Thessalonica, a worldly-minded dean of St Paul's, an eighteenth century estate-owner in the West Indies, or an Anglo-Indian, patriot first and quasi-Christian afterwards, has little or no heart to feel the woes outside his own restricted caste; and his sympathies are so narrow that the religion of Jesus is in no hurry to count him as

either disciple or friend. If he felt in any degree the sorrows of the Crucified, he would have learned to feel also the world-sorrows for the healing of which a heart big with infinitude of love gave its holy blood. It is well to speak plainly. Such a man may possibly be a good, average first-century Jew, but he will scarcely pass muster as a Christian; and the prophets of the Old Testament who had large views of God's purposes towards the outlying world, would not have given him his certificate as a decent Jew. He must be frivolously thoughtless or imperviously hard who assumes that Christianity was ordained to bring healing and amelioration into the stricken lives of a group of Western nations, but that it has no adaptation to the nations of the East or of the South. To suppress the messenger of good tidings is like prohibiting the movements of the Red Cross brigade in times of war and making implements of healing contraband. Such a temper indicates the last stage of rotten-ripe degeneracy, as well as contempt for the all-embracing genius of the Christian faith. Men of this type do sometimes call themselves Churchmen, and even Dissenters, but they are inaccessible to the teaching of the New Testament and deaf to the solemn mandate of Jesus Himself. They speak and act counter to the purpose of His last sublime commission. They put their own price upon the Gentile soul and treat it according to the market they have made, for-

getting the ransom for all men Jesus paid upon the cross.

THIS POLICY OF INTOLERANCE WAS A SIGN THAT THE JEWS THEMSELVES WERE BLIND TO THE TRUE WORTH OF THE GOSPEL. It had been preached at their very doors, but it was hard for them to think that they had anything to gain by the doctrine of Paul and his fellow-labourers. To their unbelieving hearts the evangel was disguised in sackcloth, and its presence was like a darkening of the air by the vampire wings of a destroying angel coming to fulfil the self-invoked curse—"His blood be upon us and our children." Their consciences were not at rest and, as they judged things, the message from the cross and the sepulchre could not be other than dissonant and condemnatory. The repressive measures taken against the apostles and their testimony were a last vain attempt to whitewash the past, and to appease the mordant approaches that were gnawing with intermittent torment their inmost souls. The name of Jesus brought no accent of deliverance, forgiveness, privilege, Divine redemption, but sounded more like a knell of doom to an ill-fated nation. It did nothing for them because they were disobedient to it, and no wonder they assumed it could do nothing for others. Where it carries light, joy, deliverance into the soul, the impulse to spread it will be spontaneous and irresistible.

He who treats even crude, illiterate missionary work as though it were an enterprise of second-rate

importance only, or indeed an enterprise fraught with hurtful possibilities, does not know the power and enrichment true religion brings into human life. It may be doubted whether he is a believer in the doctrines of grace, and he who is not a believer in the doctrines of grace is without faith in Christ, duly baptized though he may be and forward to call himself by that ever-blessed name. Christianity has ministered no genuine, permanent, experimental gain in the life of such a person or he could not be an uninterested spectator of its spread amongst others. To find out how far the disintegration of your faith has gone, and to what extent your evangelical senses have begun to deteriorate, is a process needing no expert. Through what ranges do your spiritual impulses vibrate? Put yourselves to the proof. If Jesus Christ be in you it is as the mainspring of a world-inclusive yearning, and you must respond to the incitements of His ever-expanding love; for He died for the other sheep who bear the brand of an alien ownership, and He cannot be satisfied till He sees the fruit of His redeeming pain. The narrow provincialised religionist may have absorbed reflected influences from the personality of Jesus, and the sacred knock may be at the portal, but He does not enjoy the real presence, unless throbs of movement find a centre and a starting-point within His soul which seek to encircle the world. Defective forms of the Christian religion prove their own lack by failing to discover the man of Macedonia who cries, "Come

over and help us." Such communities only become missionary when the convert is half made and the spread of Western light has turned the Oriental into a Theist and a Reformer, friendly to Jesus Christ but not convinced of His claim as a Divine Saviour. They go forth not because of any high experience which thrusts them into the field, nor because they can add much to the faith of those who have entered upon a transition stage, but because the man of Macedonia has become a clubable comrade with whom they can exchange notes.

If the Gospel has brought healing to the conscience, power over evil to the daily life, faith, hope, tenderness to the heart, charm, purity, sacredness to the home, we must teach the secret to the world. Such spiritual forces are expansive, not self-centred, and perish by restriction. The man in our midst who has no sympathy with the work of Christ in heathen lands is one whose shrivelled beliefs would match those of the degenerate Jew when he lost his fatherland. He makes God tribal once more, and what may have been venial in the early days of religious culture is rank blasphemy now. He sees no more glory in the Son of Man than did Caiaphas, and has no sense of fellowship with His broad spirit of humanity. We may test in this way our possession of the evangelical spirit. The Gospel is a dead letter to us, and our true orthodoxy is lost, if we are no longer on the side of missionary enterprise.

Before we credit everything said against foreign

missions by gossipy travellers and surface-skimming war correspondents, it may be well for us to ask for further information. The attacks may be made by anonymous unbelievers. A lack of religious faith sometimes hides itself under the forms of diplomatic sagacity, zeal for country and commerce, regret that money needed for the solution of home problems should be wasted in futile offers of Christianity to those who do not want it. A more trenchant analysis and closer knowledge might show to us that a temper of virulent godlessness often masks in these plausible sophistries. Unless we feel the one overwhelming motive to spread the Gospel—its power in our personal salvation—we shall easily come to side with misleading criticisms, and find ourselves more or less at one with the old repressionists in their programme. If we have less enthusiasm for this work than our fathers, is it not because we have less faith, and our religion is beginning to die from the roots upwards?

Friendly criticisms upon missionary methods should be welcome to all open and intelligent minds. There is criticism and criticism. To ignore well-meant discussion of missionary questions is not the way to increase efficiency and bring near the triumph of the truth. The Guiana Indian holds an ant in his fingers, and applies it to the feet of the child who is slow in learning to walk. Perhaps the lesson is somewhat harsh in its form. There is a criticism which may not be pleasant to the sensitive

soul, and yet, after all, it will quicken the pace of our missionary movements. There is a criticism which is like the bite of an adder, and is intended to kill; and such criticism will prove itself a fang of death in the breast of the man who devises it.

THESE JEWISH OBSTRUCTIONISTS WERE MOVED BY A PROFANE SCORN FOR THE CROWN RIGHTS OF JESUS CHRIST. Their official representatives a few years back had ridiculed and punished His claim to kingship, and they could not now, even in a distant colony, give any countenance to a movement which assumed that He was the light of the Gentiles, as well as the glory of Israel. One claim might lead back to the other. It was their interest to look upon Him either as a pretender or a misguided fanatic. They could not bring themselves to imagine that He was exalted above all heaven a Prince and a Saviour, for this implied rights of universal sovereignty. Is it not obvious that he who declines to look upon the heathen as a part of the inheritance of God's enthroned Son, has quite as mean a faith in His redeeming prerogative, and feels as scanty a degree of honour for the name which is the keynote of world-wide music, as these belated persecutors at Jerusalem and Thessalonica? No analysis can find a trace of Christianity in such petty, perverse, disbelieving souls. Within recent years politicians have unearthed, and flung at each other, the epithet "Little Englander." And into the issues involved

in that question, it is not my purpose to enter. Perhaps the person so named is one of the lay figures of political fiction. But there is a corresponding type, deserving our more serious contempt, which has an existence all too real in the churches of Christendom. There are those who think of the kingdom of heaven as petty in its measurements, and hemmed in by parochial frontiers; and they dwarf their own souls by this ignoble exclusiveness. Indeed, they are stained with treason. A Saviour who can do nothing for the Gentiles is not likely to save a little clannish adherent to the uttermost. The temper which puts bounds to the dominion of Jesus Christ is the temper which once slew Him and overthrew Jerusalem; and it crucifies Him anew. These missionary prohibitionists would kill His spirit in the world, as a counsel of expediency; and he who is the enemy of His sovereignty over all sorts and conditions of men cannot be a friend of the undivided race he seeks to rule. To reduce Jesus into a petty princeling, to ignore His claim to empire, to affirm there are minds so organised they cannot appreciate His work, is a form of disesteem akin to that of the suicidal partisanship of the ancient Jews, and He becomes once more despised and rejected. An aggressive faith is the only loyalty Christ accepts. Wherever missionary movements decline there is an insidious distrust of the illimitable vastness of Christ's sovereignty. A Christ whose rights lie within narrow geographical areas, a Christ of the temperate

and not of the torrid zones, a Christ of the west and not of the east, is a petty Christ to whom we may as well say at once a respectful farewell. Love desires empire for the person on whom it is fixed, and he who does not seek ever-growing dominion for the Lord Jesus, cannot sincerely love Him, and, in Paul's view, is one upon whom an anathema justly rests. There are men who would be content to keep Christ always what they have conceived Him in the paltry constrictions of their thought. If He is supreme in our hearts, we shall wish to extend His supremacy through every land upon which the sun shines.

Such opposition to the spread of the Gospel, the apostle reminds us, is *a sign of ripeness for wrath and uttermost doom.* When men resent the onward march of Christianity we do not need to be told that they have little or no personal sympathy with its distinctive genius. If men are unfriendly to the expansion of the kingdom, this is a token that they are lukewarm towards the kingdom itself when it comes nigh them, and that their souls do not respond to the wonderful personality of the unseen King. It is impossible to have a Christianity divorced from missions, for missions are the outflow of vital faith and love, and where the outflow is cut off, religion becomes a Dead Sea of soul-withering formalism around whose margin the miasma always hovers. The Church whose interest in the non-Christian populations of the world begins to decline, is in sight of its own grave. Holy

enterprises for the dissemination of the faith through the wider world are the very pores through which the Church breathes. In a Chinese monastery I once saw the mummy of a Buddhist priest which had been made an object of worship. To arrest corruption, the body already emaciated in life by years of fasting, was covered over with an air-tight coat of lacquer. Such a process would have destroyed a living man as surely as poison, for it effectually closed up all the pores of the skin. A self-contained church, a church shut up within an air-tight shroud of domestic enterprises, varnished into elegance and respectability, is a church in which the spirit of Jesus cannot live. Insularity is a mark of selfishness, and when we not only reject the Gospel ourselves, but keep it from others, the guilt is increased, and the threatening perdition is deepened. The Christian church is not a hermitage into which a handful of decorous people gather to forget the strain and tumult of the outside world. It is the essence of religion that it should spread, and spread by the common action of its adherents. Sympathy with missionary movements is no insignificant element in our probation upon earth. The narrow, secular, racial temper will bring upon us wrath to the uttermost. Is it no sin to scorn a Gentile, to demean the crown rights of Jesus Christ, to cry down the voice of the herald upon the mountains, and put a stumbling-block in his path? To harass the missionary movement of the Church,

is to fire on the red flag Jesus is sending through the world as a symbol of healing and salvation. We are becoming dead to the worth of the Gospel when we question whether it will be a gain for others to hear and receive it. "Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, but wrath is come upon them to the uttermost."

XIX.

THE THREE INDWELLINGS.

"He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him."
—1 JOHN iv. 16.

AT the Feast of Tabernacles which preceded His death, Jesus had spoken of the honour promised to His hearers through abiding in His word, and at the last Passover He summed up the idea with all its cognate applications in the imperishable similitude of the vine and the branches. It is John who both records the words in his gospel and expands them into their glorious significance in his epistle.

To bring home to our minds the force of this spiritual axiom, it is perhaps scarcely necessary to say that the word "dwell" is used to describe our Lord's sojourn in the places which gave Him a heedful hearing, and in the homes where He was honoured with a grateful hospitality. It is used in the instruction given to the disciples that when they entered into a new town or village they were to tarry in the house accounted worthy, and were not to pass fitfully from one home circle to another. The man

who after the model of an apostolic guest in a devout family abides steadfastly in love, will find himself insphered within God as in an inviolable refuge, and will prove likewise that God has made the soul of His faithful servant a shrine of His own manifestations and activities.

To dwell in love is the ethical basis for God's inhabitation of the human spirit as well as for man's consciousness of the all-encircling presence and power of God. The thoughts, the affections, and the habits of the life must be tender, gracious, rich in good-will. Moods of feeling or motives of action tinctured with pride, envy, rancour, and malice, are alien to this high state. It is of an active principle of love and not of a vague emotional sentiment that the apostle affirms this wonderful fact. When Boswell said to Dr Samuel Johnson that he often blamed himself for not feeling towards those in distress as sensibly as many others say they do, his hero replied, "Sir, don't be duped by them any more. You will find these feeling people are not very ready to do you good. They pay you by feeling." Nor does this principle of love imply an unreal and flattering view of men and women in whose characters dark and repulsive features appear, but it always shows its power by softening moral aversion into pity, and inspiring the hope of an offender's recovery to righteousness. It may sometimes happen that we observe the law of love towards those with whom we are in direct personal

contact, and cherish hatred towards those who are not in the immediate horizon of our life. Hatred when cast out from the heart, and no longer directing itself against those with whom we have daily converse, often entrenches itself in the imagination, devising evil and passing fierce sentences of wrath upon those whose forms are not present to the eye and whose personalities are perhaps misjudged and misconceived. This passion which is the contradiction of love, thus fortifies itself in a new and shadowy region of the compound nature, embittering many secret streams in the life, and keeping the soul out of the exalted experience described by St John. This principle ought to exclude all unreasoning race-hatred, and mingle a benign compassion with the protests against international wrong-doing Christian fidelity may compel us to make. The man who teaches that a nation can prosper by giving rein to its hatred of competing nations, is a demon running riot in the angelic disguise of a patriot. The flame-fanning politician robs his contemporaries of incomparable honour and spiritual privilege, for God cannot dwell in the midst of a nation which is consumed by envy, hatred, and the passion for war. Any race possessed by anger towards rival races, is a race with a lost vocation and threatened by the disaster of a departing God.

It is by the message of the Gospel that men are brought into this state of love which underlies all

vital fellowship with God. The Spirit of God imparted through His Son brings men into this benign atmosphere, and having once breathed it, they must make their permanent abode in its mystic environment. The love to which these great things are assured is no mere function of the natural life, for the primary instincts of love are more or less fleeting and unstable. The innate tenderness of the bird or beast towards its offspring is stimulated to meet a passing exigency of helplessness, and then tends to die down, if it does not finally disappear. In many cases the adult offspring merges itself with the common herd and there are no permanently specialised family ties. Perhaps this is due in part to limitations in the mental development. The love even of human parent and child is frail and does not always mature into a rational principle which will stand stress and strain. All natural love tends to inconstancy, unless reinforced by a spiritual principle. It is the power of the Gospel, and no inherent affability of the temperament which will induce that abiding in a wide and all-embracing love to which the great things here spoken of are possible.

John tells us how we must enter into that state of love in which these high experiences of God await us (iv. 12). It is the demonstration of God's redeeming love to us which creates within us the temper of a new life. And then he goes on to point out how, having entered into love, we may close the gate which leads back into the jarring world, and secure

our souls in this new realm of experience and spiritual sensibility. "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him, and he in God." A man has scarcely made for himself a sure resting-place at the redemptive centre of God's love, till he responds to its assurances by confessing to others the manifestation of love he has received in Christ Jesus. And then in the words of our text he tells us how we may guard ourselves in the possession of this high inheritance. We must continue it by keeping the spirit of the new life, never allowing ourselves to be led astray into tempers and actions inimical to the best interests of God's redeemed children, or adverse to the highest welfare of the outside world. We must keep ourselves within the sacred precincts, and limit our thought and speech, feeling and action, to domains which are suffused with the benignity of this sovereign virtue.

An observant traveller tells us that it is a mistake to suppose that there is absolutely no life in the waters of the Dead Sea. He had found tiny fish upon the margin, in the little eddies of fresh water formed by the scanty mountain streams as they emptied themselves into the weird welter of desolation. But what a pitiable and a precarious life! One would have thought the fish would have had wit enough to keep well up the stream and avoid this close contact with the realm of bitterness and death.

And do not some of us, while keeping in the little

currents of Divine charity and good-will that flow about our daily lives, venture terribly near to the Dead Sea of the world's bitterness? We are tempted to think as the selfish world thinks, to act according to its heartless maxims, and to tarry in the common currents where waters from the sweet and bitter fountains both mingle. It is a wonder we live at all, for gall and wormwood are around us on every side, and threaten to permeate the character. We may lose God, and God will cease to have any part in us unless we get as far away as possible from bitterness and moral death. Keep near the sweet fountains, and put as much space as you can between your soul and the world's rancours. "All my springs are in thee" O thou infinite love. "He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him."

Two or three truths lie at the foundation of this great declaration of privilege—one expressed and the other implied.

This reciprocal indwelling of God in man and man in God, rests upon the mighty truth that God is love. Love is the rhythmic breath of the Divine life, the wonderful heart-force out of which its restless, immeasurable activities arise. Just as an unbroken texture of nerve tissue covers every limb of the human body, and enswathes every organ it contains, making possible knowledge, sentient contact, effective action, so love is the fine sensitive vesture in which all the Divine attributes are clothed. His wisdom is

the wisdom of love, His power is pre-eminently the power of love, His holiness is the holiness of love, His boundless presence is the immanence of unlimited good-will, His relation to all the star-set immensities of space is a relation directly or indirectly of pure graciousness. No other word so adequately sums up the mysteries of His inscrutable being.

And then the apostle's declaration implies that God's love is aware of all the finite loves in which there is the slightest trace of kinship with His own. If it could be affirmed of any created being that he was love, it would be quite impossible to build up on any such basis a declaration so absolute as that of the text. Men sometimes live side by side with each other for a lifetime without discovering how much they have in common, and how cordial is their mutual good-will. Nations which are secretly inclined to like each other, through ignorance, lack of common interests, and difficulties of communication continue for generations frigid, isolated, unresponsive. Denseness, defective insight, dullness of imagination keep in chilling isolation souls made to revel in each other's sympathy, and to blend like parts of perfect music. The untutored barbarian finds the philanthropist who appears in his midst an enigma, for he knows nothing of philanthropy overleaping tribal barriers. Some maimed bird from the woods is brought into the house and the children want to tend it with all the gentleness of hospital nurses. They stretch out entreating hands and make pretty speeches,

spread for it royal banquets, offer it a generous partnership in the use of their toys. But there is no common ground-work of ideas between them. It cannot read these signs of friendship, and the poor thing is as unhappy as though hawks were hovering in the clouds. If it has not already died of fright, the first time the window sash is open it flies away to the woods. It cannot appreciate or interpret the love which would fain woo its friendship in a strange world. It lacks power to perceive. But God's love is conscious of all other loves, and has the power, moreover, of interpreting itself to willing and lowly hearts. It knows where to find the first sign of this ethereal affection, and how to enter into fellowship with it. The apostle is not implying that love is an impersonal abstraction only, and that our love moves in an orbit, where it will perchance find affinities, also blind, helpless, automatic. Love involves personal consciousness, and love in God implies not only consciousness of itself, but consciousness likewise of all other loves waiting for the comfort and inspiration of its strong fellowship.

Fellowship is one of the profound and sacred necessities of love, for love is a social attribute. It is compelled by its own inherent qualities to seek alliance, combination, reciprocity, friendship. The idea of communion is not so fundamental to the qualities of the other attributes with which love is associated. We can conceive of power that is centred in a jealous potentate, of wisdom that shuns

the common walks of men and hides itself in a cloister, of a stern righteousness that contemplates from afar the clash of opposing interests, and holds the balance in austere silence. But we cannot think of solitary love, of love withdrawn into itself. Love is always venturing forth to find its kindred, and enter into lives which promise response to its mysteries. The secret of it fades away from the soul of the recluse, and sinks into a gloomy aching memory of loss. When love possesses a nature which is all-conscious, vigilant, sentient to whatever love may be kindling unseen in lowlier natures, it is always possible that the higher love may mingle itself into a common life with the meaner love whose senses are dim.

It is by the pathway of moral, rather than intellectual methods, that God sees fit to come into communion with us. We may sometimes murmur at the pride-rebuking ways of a Deity who draws not one step closer to us for the depth of our thinking, the subtlety of our speculation or the wide range of our sagacious analogies and comparisons; but the law of His revelation is unalterable. "No man hath seen God at any time; if we dwell in love God dwelleth in love, and His love is perfected in us." This and this only is the common ground upon which we may meet. His revelations reach us not by the faculties of the brain; but through all the best affections of the soul. The most correct and penetrating theologies may fail to reflect a single ray

of His glory. He comes by those channels through which pulses of pure and humble love flow. The unfoldings of knowledge arise from love. The intellectual blemishes in our thought and service of God need cause us no distress or misgiving. A deeper and more steadfast love will accelerate our understanding, and we shall not fail to apprehend with a genuine consciousness the mystic Being who comes to insphere and possess our souls.

In the palace where he will one day reign, a prince is born. At first he knows little or nothing of that which lies about him. He has no eye for the coloured marbles of staircase or corridor. Reared in the midst of art treasures they are scarcely of more account to him than to the blind. Rubies and sapphires have no higher value than the trinkets of the cradle. But he has a privilege of daily contact not possessed by a stray visitor to a museum, and contact brings knowledge. If we dwell in love we are in God's temple on a common meeting-ground, in vital contact with the Eternal Himself, and if we keep ourselves in this love we shall soon know more about God than if an angel of heaven could describe Him to us. Contact is the supreme educator. To those who think their thoughts and live their lives in a realm of tender spiritual affection, God makes Himself a sublime object-lesson, and turns a mean life into a shining theophany.

In this daring assertion that God and man dwell in each other through love, there is no latent taint of

Pantheism. God's presence in the soul is in no sense an incarnation, nor is the believer's access into the life of God such an absorption of the human into the Divine as Oriental mystics have conceived. The identity of God on the one hand and of the saint admitted into this great fellowship on the other, is no more dissipated by this mystic process than a man is merged into the atmosphere he breathes, or a note of music is neutralised by the kindred note with which it forms a chord. In fact, the Pantheistic view of God and the universe is selfish in its ethical basis, for it assumes the greater must attract and swallow up the less. When a manufacturer sets himself to absorb a group of smaller firms we call it greed, egoism, hard, cruel, economic warfare. When religious philosophy, in speculating upon the destiny of the creature, postulates a similar process, I do not know that we can call it by any other name. Pantheistic faiths teach that man's personality is evanescent, and that by spiritual discipline, or in due time by death, it will be lost in the supreme. The theory is not one of pure philosophy only, for it transfers to the all-absorbing God the selfish aggrandisement which so often blights the excellence of character. Once admit that God is love, and the mind is secure against such errors and heresies. The Christianity of Jesus and John and Paul can never drift into such specious theosophies without logical suicide. Its ethic of love safeguards it against the speculative peril. Selfishness may seek to draw

all things into itself as into a devouring vortex; but love seeks to conserve by linking them into fellowship and associated life. If identity is to vanish there can be no more abiding of God in man and man in God, than there can be the abiding of ocean and rain-drop in each other after the rain-drop has been merged into the wave. If they are pure from evil, God cherishes all the traits whose sum makes personality, however strongly marked they may be. He has no more desire for absolute solitude than the most sensitive and clinging of His creatures, and He dwells steadfastly in the man of love, and the man of love dwells not only under God's shadow but in the very heart in which His amazing, ineffable affections cluster. Freed from all impurity and selfishness man's nature exhales a sweetness which God delights to breathe. Love abhors isolation.

Paul tells the Athenians that men are "the offspring of God," and that it is in God they live and move and have their being. The sacred presence was not far from any one of them. But the presence which gives and sustains life through its constant inbrooding, differs vastly from that more complete inhabitation, which is the specific privilege of the spirit responding to the love of Jesus Christ. The natural man is in contact with the activities of those parts of the Divine nature which the theologian has taught us to call "the natural attributes." He is encompassed by vitalising energies, which enswathe the whole round of the sentient creation. But the

disciple who loves, enters into all that is deepest and most sacred in the moral life of God, whilst God Himself broods within that sphere of the human consciousness to which He finds access through faith and love.

A selfish and unspiritual man's sense of God's presence is like the lot of a wandering Arab, who has pitched his habitation for a few nights within a roofless temple in Karnak, or a desolate palace in Palmyra. Gigantic columns tower towards the stars and gateways of magnificent art shut him in from the desert; but within his poor fragile dwelling of canvas there is cold, penury, and wretchedness, for the luxury which once matched his external surroundings is gone. The winds wail like hungry beasts, the rains pelt through the rents and seams of his tent; and, flanked on all sides by gigantic columns, and surrounded by the sculptured masterpieces of the past, he shivers in solitude and pain. Two thousand years ago, the vast and stately courts were filled with guests. Rare wines sparkled in vessels of silver and of gold. The banquet was spread with dainties, and lit by lamps fed with fragrant oils. The music of the viol was heard; and each guest, clad in purple and fine linen, felt himself high in the favour of the king, and exulted in the festive splendour. But the poor Arab cowers within the stately skeleton of the past, and no real hospitality is lavished upon him in his desolation. His life drags on amidst the austere immensities which surrounded

the ancient guests; but what a difference between the two scenes!

And such is the difference between the natural man, whose common bodily life is passed within the defences of God's immeasurable wisdom and power; and the spiritual man, who through the love learned in his redemption, dwells in God, and God in him. The one draws the breath of his poor meagre life within the majestic precincts of God's all-sustaining providence; but within his narrow nature there is a sordid, petty, earth-bound imprisonment. With the other, who has learned to love, the mean environment is gone, and he dwells in the cloud of God's glory, and in the secret shrine of His fellowship. God in all His perfections comes down to live in us through the power of love. The Divine and the human are interfused. The grace that visits us in redeeming love goes back to God, carrying us with it on eagles' wings. God bows Himself to dwell in man, and man rises up to meet God, and make the Divine heart his refuge.

Intimate Knowledge, Practical Appropriation, Rooted Attachment, and Stable Relationship, are thoughts suggested by this mystic indwelling.

This figure of inhabitation implies the familiar knowledge which arises from proximity and daily contact. Nature rarely speaks to us, though we may even possess the poet's faculty for perceiving her undertones, when we find ourselves suddenly plunged into foreign scenes, or when our power of

absorbing impressions is dissipated by the turmoil of rapid travel. In novel surroundings the mind finds it difficult to maintain its balance and receptivity. The genius of a strange landscape seems to speak in an unknown tongue, which we must needs take time to learn. But in the surroundings of our home, where every object has become familiarised to us by the quiet outlook of years, we can hear the voices of Nature, and have a vague sense of intimacy and mutual understanding. We are on easy and familiar terms with the scenes which have environed us for a lifetime. We can find our way in the dark to the smallest object in the home that has almost become a part of our senses. When we tread the ground over which we have passed to and fro from the days of our childhood, we recognise the very whisperings of the flowers. We can interpret the many voices of the winds as they career through the woods, or make shrill music amongst the gables. The sense of fear, the feeling of strangeness, rarely if ever comes back to us. No reserve binds our thought or fetters our speech. Everything yields itself to our hand, as though fitted to it from the beginning. Our hearts flow out unchecked, for we have acquired an adequate knowledge of the conditions within which our destiny is set.

And a gracious process not unlike this is brought to pass when man comes into accord with the law of the great God of love, for a finite and an infinite consciousness are harmonised with each other, and

interact with knowledge and confidence. The Divine Father and His earthly child are not only within speaking distance, but stand within each other's thoughts and counsels. We can call upon Him and He upon us at will, with the certainty that the call will not be vain. He has no need to first seek us out, nor we to order our steps for a long search that we may haply find Him. The sense of strangeness and distance is gone. There is agreement, reciprocity, mutual understanding, complete coadjustment, before the silence is broken.

When those who have been long divided meet again, there is always more or less of reserve. They know not what influences may have been at work to change or modify the characteristic temperament during the long term of silence. They need to thaw, to watch and study each other for days till at last they mutually find again the characteristics which were the bases of the old sympathy. Or, perhaps, the reserve is dissolved in a moment by a spontaneous outburst of generosity. For those who are always living well within each other's thought and life, no such tentative experiments are necessary. Where there is mutual indwelling, there is knowledge and sacred intimacy. God, and the believer who abides in the love of Jesus Christ, know each other without a reserve. Each lives at the centre of the other's mind.

Through a continuous sojourn in the sphere where we establish ourselves we learn the measure of the

resources it has to offer, and are enabled to use them in furthering the ends we cherish. When an early apostle became a guest in a gracious Jewish home, he would find its service, its friendships, its helps, its privileges, placed at his call. If we are inhabitants of a particular district of the country, we get the warmth when the sun shines, and invigoration to the vexed nerves when the south wind blows. We taste the fruits that flourish there, and avail ourselves of all the advantages offered to body or mind. The place is for us, and the longer we stay there the more we know of what it can do for us. All things shape themselves to our touch in the houses we occupy for years. We can find the book we need. We know the contents of every room in which we live. The race which inhabits a river-valley or a sheltered hillside for generations knows the genius of the place, and can make it the minister of its will. The accomplished scientist suddenly put down there is helpless in comparison with the unlettered native. He cannot till the fields, sail the rivers, or empty the mines of their treasures, as can the man who has lived there for fifty years, and has got into his fingers the clue to its secrets. He who abides there knows the uses of the herbs, the virtues of the soils, the grains of the timber, the habits of birds, fishes, and beasts. He can make the country do its best when he tills the fields and puts in his seed. To a stranger the possession of vast tracts of the soil would be a barren inheritance

for years to come, but the dweller there can use, appropriate, adjust, and get great returns from the natural possibilities of the district.

Hidden and unsearchable treasures open themselves to our need when we continue to dwell in God by abiding in love. All the mighty forces of the Divine nature respond to our touch. We get sunshine, exhilaration, expanding capacity, richer life from God, as readily as we get ozone from the sea and mountain breeze. By dwelling in God we hold the key of access to His help and immeasurable resource, and exult in the daily inspirations which visit us. And when God descends to dwell in us, our poor gifts become wondrously answerable to His character and work. He is able to do with us what He wills, to put us to all His sublime and manifold uses. There will be no faculty within us upon which He cannot lay His hand. He will get the best out of us. Whilst the analogy fails at one point, and God has not to find out our possibilities, He can only use us to the uttermost of our capacities when He makes His abode within us.

These words of indwelling imply a deep-rooted and tenacious attachment which defies divisive and disturbing change. The man who is the master of his own life chooses his habitation in the place which best suits his tastes, preferences, and general well-being. Memories of serene affection and abounding happiness grow round the home centre, and at length he feels that it would be a fate worse than death to be

torn from it. He learns to love every bush and flower, rock and pool within his daily view, and the least change which is threatened brings a sense of pain. His affections linger over the changing features of the landscape, and he desires at last that his poor dust may rest in the sweet and kindly surroundings where his life has been set. If there has been a balance of pure pleasure in his lot, combined with a warm heart and pleasant social interchange, the place of a man's continued sojourn grows into his senses, and he recoils from separation as from a bitter bereavement.

And through this interabiding of God and man in each other, which arises out of holy love, everything in God becomes strangely endeared to man; and the man himself in all his thoughts, dispositions, and practical activities becomes inexpressibly tender and sacred in the sight of God. It would be a bitter bereavement to us if we had to change our ideal of God and His ways. We could not spare a single attribute from His character, or purpose from His government, or benign mystery from His providential ways. We grow into a solemn and soul-contenting oneness with Him, rejoicing sometimes to remember that His ways are above our ways, even when we shrink from the cup He has made ready for us. He is not only the refuge of His elect servants from one generation to another, but a Paradise of rest in which our spirits are cherished. He was once far off from us and an Object of fear, but the new creation into

which love has brought us makes His overpowering personality a shrine of tranquil rapture and devotion. Everything in God becomes beautified to the vision and worship of the man who has been taught by the cross to dwell in love. And human nature in all its parts, powers, and affections, cleansed and sanctified by love, is precious before God. It is the home in which He abides, yielding Him a purer satisfaction than the possessors of the best earthly homes find there. "He will rest in His love." If God thus dwell in us, all that is good and true and strong within us is unassailable as the city whose Maker is God. "Your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost," and it is love which consecrates the temple and guards it for God's indwelling.

These words suggest the hope of indestructible relationships. Through this grace, to which John gives a supreme place, the soul is able to make its home in God, whilst God permanently enshrines Himself within the sanctified soul. If we make love the settled sphere of our thought and action, no violence can destroy that high experience in which the human spirit makes for itself a centre in God, and God mysteriously finds for Himself in the human spirit a new centre for His outgoing power and holiness. Some men seem to have a meteoric relation to God and come within the range of His attraction now and again. We must be like the fixed stars of the firmament and abide always in His light and love. If we fulfil the condition we shall

find God's relation to us constant, and shall not need to complain, like the prophet, in words charged both with depressing memories and the spirit of tender supplication, "Why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land and as one that turneth aside to tarry for the night?" We shall live in God as Anna lived in the temple, and the glory did not leave the temple till the last of the devout souls had passed away in peace.

When Solomon came to the throne, the heartless man who cursed David in the days of his exile was permitted to live on in Jerusalem upon condition that he did not cross the brook Kidron. One day two of his servants ran away to the king of Moab and Shimei forgetful of his parole saddled an ass, crossed the forbidden line and was brought back to Jerusalem to die. The line between the New Testament altruism and the selfishness of the world is the line between life and death. To go out from love is to forfeit the Divine presence and to perish, perhaps, eternally. The lines within which thought, imagination, feeling, conduct must move are well defined and known to every one of us. To transgress the law of love is to separate ourselves from the spring of light and blessedness and to put ourselves into deadly darkness. Let us see to it that the passion of avarice, the madness for either private or public revenges, the lack of love which betrays itself in neglecting the rights and interests of our neighbours, never carries us beyond the Kidron. Keep well within the bounds

of this soul-consecrating, Christlike charity preached by St John. By policies of selfishness, by sacrificing the public good to our private ends, by venom, rancour, evil-speaking, we tear the immortal spirit from its home in the soul of God, and let go the Shekinah symbol from the centre of our lives. The temple of old was destroyed because God withdrew from it. Had God still enshrined Himself there it would have been inviolable as the stars. If we abide in love we are invincible. The temple may be betrayed from within but it cannot be stormed from without, and God never leaves it till His Spirit of love is wantonly repelled. "The Lord God and the Lamb were the temple thereof." This is the grand apocalyptic similitude of the primal gravitation law of the spiritual universe, "He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him."

XX.

THE RELIGION OF POSTERITY.

"One generation shall praise Thy works to another, and shall declare Thy mighty acts."—PSALM cxlv. 4.

WHEN the Psalmist boldly declares that he himself shall bless God's name "for ever and ever," he implies his own faith in the doctrine of personal immortality. Possibly he drew the assurance expressed in these opening verses of his hymn from those Divine works upon which he goes on to dwell with so much fervour and discernment. If those works were worthy of eternal praise, the grateful choirs which celebrate the glory of those works must be deathless too. But not only is he persuaded that his own tribute to the Divine power will be continued without end, he affirms also his belief in the immortality of a praise-rendering church upon earth. He had a prophetic foresight which satisfied him that fitting honour to God's goodness should be paid by the long procession of the generations. Some men do not concern themselves deeply with the religion of posterity. If they can only win a safe entrance into heaven, they are quite content that the world should

take its own course, and sustain its own responsibilities, in any way it may think fit to choose, when they no longer have a voice in its affairs. They do not vex their souls about the developments of the future, perhaps not even giving the piety of their own children the place in their thoughts it ought to have. The Psalmist had a larger and less selfish outlook. His devotion to God saved him from indifference to the religious attitude of posterity, and constrained him to scan far-off horizons. He cherished the hope that not only should all nations one day flow into the house of the Lord, but that the men of every epoch should form together one choir and one congregation to celebrate the Divine praises. The music, whose keynotes he was striking for his own contemporaries, was but one strain in the melody of a grand, unceasing psalm. There was to be a gathering together of the generations, as well as of the scattered races, and the prolonged adoration should ring through the latest times. His remote descendants would echo his tribute to God's mercy and power. Without lapse or break, the sublime tradition should be continued ; or rather, God's goodness and power should manifest themselves in such new forms through the successive stages of history, that His praises would fill the ears of the latest generations.

It was no outburst of uncalculating enthusiasm which led the Psalmist to avow his conviction that the grateful worship in which he was taking part should never cease. It is true the psalm before us is

an inspired rhapsody, but there is a quiet wisdom in its rushing rhythm, and the judgment of a wide experience in its holy boasts. It was no novice or recluse, no child in worldly knowledge, who penned these stanzas, and put on record his conviction that a permanent breach between the generations upon the vital question of religion was impossible.

Without committing ourselves to the authority of the inscription, which speaks of the psalm as David's, we may assume that the writer had a wide acquaintance with men and things. He was perhaps familiar as were other psalmists with a God-repudiating temper. And the young, crude Atheism of those early times, with no perspective of history to sober it and no prolonged chronicles of the tenacious religious instinct to curb its vaunting, may have been more militant than the Atheism of our own day. With pompous volubility it would doubtless declare that within a century the name of Jehovah would be forgotten, and the memory of His so-called mighty acts be irrecoverably faded. The Psalmist had impious controversies to reckon with.

And this nation dedicated to the praise of God's works was surrounded as by a ring-fence with greater and stronger empires in whose grasp it was helpless. The earthen vessel was between two iron pots, and the iron pots had an unpleasant power of locomotion. If the perpetuity of God's praise had to turn upon the arms and the political independence of the chosen race, the basis of hope might seem to be slender

indeed. Possibly when the Psalmist wrote, forecasts of humiliation and subsequent captivity may have been already darkening the air. Causes for profound anxiety were not far to seek. And yet the writer expresses his confidence that God's praise on earth would never cease.

The question is more critical to-day than at any previous period in the history of mankind. The world has passed through its animistic, its religious, and its metaphysical stages, and is now swiftly passing into the stage where it will cast off the spiritual. So we are often told. Some years ago two unbelievers were taking their Sunday walk through the streets of Paris. Observing a vast, well-dressed crowd pouring out of the Madeleine, one of them said to his companion, "God has a great many visitors to-day." "Yes," was the reply, "but they are paying farewell calls."

Is there any truth for us in that scoffing prophecy? Are we verging upon an age of widespread irreligion? Will our churches soon be forsaken and desolate? Will the Layards and Schliemanns and Petries of a thousand years hence be searching out the foundation courses of half-forgotten cathedrals at Canterbury, Lincoln, York, Durham, and in the cities of London and Westminster? Will the Max Müllers, who will be lecturing to their students in the midst of the long apostacy, have to explain obscure allusions in the hymns of Cowper, Watts, Wesley, Keble, Bonar, by quoting the idioms of an obsolete Bible? Are the

unbelief and irreligion, so much in favour with some sections of society, passing symptoms only; or will they overmaster the generations to come? May it perhaps happen that the works and praises of God will be forgotten? Or are we warranted in cherishing the Psalmist's hope that, when our lips are changed to dust, other lips will prolong our songs?

The perpetuation of the faith, humanly speaking, is no easy task. All the work of yesterday has to be done afresh every decade, and to be done in different ways. We speak as though the past conquests of religion furnished a stable and sufficient vantage-ground for the sure progress of the future, which is only partially true, for faith does not tend to become hereditary and inherent. The power of God comes upon one generation, and wins its leading minds to truth and goodness; and then a new generation rises into view, with the same strong and difficult passions as those once agitating the generation now reclaimed to God, and obedient to His will. New outbursts of wilfulness and irreverence, new and ingenious novelties in the art of religious denial, parade themselves before us. An invention which promises to change much encounters strong opposition at the outset, but once established, no one dreams of putting it on one side. We have not to convert every new generation to the locomotive, to the acceptance of electricity, to the penny postage, household suffrage; and, a few months ago, we might, perhaps, have said to anti-slavery principles and to free trade. But it is not so with the

conversion of the world into sympathy with God, and the acceptance of His saving methods. New generations are coming into view every year, with new passions that need their own processes of transformation, new arguments which must be answered in new ways, new prejudices which must be softened and removed by new endowments of meekness and wisdom. If we trust only to the spiritual momentum of the past ages and take our ease, the gloomiest prophecies, based upon the recent census of church attendance, will come to pass.

The discrepancy between widely-separated generations tends to be sharp, and if they could come into close quarters with each other, might issue in more miserable wars than any which history records. The feuds of the passing day are often the feuds of men who belong to incongruous epochs. The ideas of the older generations upon some subjects cannot be made palatable to the new. When medievalists, eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth century men, live side by side, it is hard to find a working agreement into which they will fall. The dissensions which rend nations are often the disparities which exist between the traditions of the historian and the anticipations of the prophet. Many political animosities admit of being classified under this formula. On one side you have men who idealise a dead past, and on the other, men who idealise an unborn future; whilst between the two there is a centre which does not wish to force the pace. Methusaleh and

a brand-new University graduate, Solomon and Haeckel, the apostle Paul and Leslie Stephens, if brought together in council, would feel as unhappy in each other's company, as ants from different ants' nests. To try and harmonise the old and the new is said to be sheer madness. It would be child's play in comparison to anneal a divided Christendom into a consistent whole. The ages steeped in belief of the supernatural, are separated by an impassable chasm from the ages of pure criticism, and no bland ingenuity can establish coherence between them. Few Babels are quite so disorderly and unintelligible as the confusions between the generations produced by time. The days of religious credulity are passed, and the days of positive science are at hand.

Is this view sometimes propounded of the hopeless incompatability of separated epochs, accurate or grossly exaggerated? Is there not more to unite than to divide the best souls of all centuries? Are there not sympathies common to the stone, the bronze, the iron, and the steam-age—sympathies that pervade the tastes and dominate the character? Is human history a chaos of dissonance? Between coarse, primitive man, in his damp, gloomy cave, and the finished genius of the laboratory, is there not an unbroken thread of religious continuity? Both are possessed by a common hunger for the infinite. No one can anticipate the revolutions of science, or the change through which human

institutions will pass, but the sense of spiritual mysteries will run through all after-time, and unite men into one who are dissimilar in all other respects. "One generation shall praise Thy works to another, and declare Thy mighty acts." Man must climb far higher than he can yet see before his capacity for wonder will cease.

The Psalmist's assurance rested upon two things:— THE ENDURING WORKS OF GOD, AND THE POWER OF HUMAN NATURE IN ALL AGES TO DISCERN AND VALUE THAT WORK.

1. THE CONTINUITY OF GOD'S WONDERFUL WORKS ENSURES THE PRAISE OF ALL COMING TIME. If we read through the psalm, we shall find that the Divine activities which are the theme of the writer's song are to be seen both in the realm of Nature and in the domain of history. These two spheres present amazing illustrations of strength and gentleness which cannot fail to excite wonder and thanksgiving. "He upholdeth all that fall and raiseth up those that be bowed down." God's ministry of sympathy to those who suffer may be a truer key to the heart of God than the creation of that perfect world could be, for which the fastidious man of science sometimes calls. From His open hand "He satisfies the desire of every living thing," caring for the least as well as the greatest, and if the greatest are not satisfied, it is because they have forgotten their own greatness and seek to satisfy themselves with things meant only for the meanest. The wider education

in sympathy which falls to men with the growing centuries, cannot surely lead them to look with diminished interest upon the unseen God of providence, who is "good to all," and whose "tender mercies are over all His works."

But we sometimes hear that the Worker is unreal, and the works which are reputed to reflect His glory are melancholy shadows. Not a little criticism is passed upon the bit of the universe where our lot is cast, and many suggestions are made as to the ways in which it might have been dealt with. The earth is said to be full of discreditable blunders, productive of endless mischief and reflecting no great credit upon its Maker, if ever it had a Maker. Things happen, not by the will of man only, which ought not to happen. Our children will soon look upon the world and its scenes with none of the old reverence characteristic of our forefathers, who thought it was filled with the glory of God, and penned their infantile hymns of creation. The new science is at hand, and it spares nothing. Well, if such views spread, it must be allowed the Psalmist was wrong, and posterity will manage to get on without a religion.

The new view of matter into which our chemists and electricians are feeling their way, is not less suggestive of the glory and power of the Most High than any of the conceptions held in the past. A few years ago there was a tendency to look upon all inorganic matter as inert, and when astronomers told us of the scores of millions of worlds, brought

within knowledge by the arts of photography, we were inclined to think of the universe as though it were an inconceivably vast store of raw material that might, or might not, be made to serve the ends of life. An infinite and unending brick and timber yard, an inexhaustible quarry of dead impassive stuff waiting to be used if the chance came, a territory with unexplored frontiers stocked with from sixty to a hundred chemical elements in multiform shapes and colours, was the idea which possessed us. Now we are told that every atom out of which a chemical element is built up is made up of hundreds of thousands of electrons in intense and unceasing movement, luminous as the flashes given off by radium without loss or exhaustion. Such electrons can never take the place of God; but this change from the idea of an inert to a dynamic universe gives us a higher sense of the glory of God, and raises our reverence for Him in whom all things subsist. In this new view of Nature we see the garment with which He clothes Himself, the unwearying tremors of the infinite force behind life, and the visible heart-throbs of eternal power and righteousness. Such a change in our scientific conceptions is not likely to put God far off from us, and silence our songs.

As to the ruthlessness of Nature and the bad treatment man is said to receive at her hands the case is greatly misrepresented, and man is more often than not the victim of his own ignorance and

folly. Indeed, he can only be cured of these defects by a treatment which, for the time being, seems hard and unfeeling. A great scientist who found one of his chief enjoyments in tilting against the theologians, and who tells us that he could discover nothing in Nature corresponding to the idea of a Divine Fatherhood, says in a letter to Charles Kingsley, "I have the firmest belief that the Divine Government (if we may use such a phrase, to express the sum of the customs of matter) is wholly just. The more I know intimately of the lives of others (to say nothing of my own) the more obvious it is to me that the wicked does not flourish, nor is the righteous punished. But for all this we must bear in mind what almost all forget, that the rewards of life are contingent upon obedience to the whole of law (physical as well as moral), and that moral obedience will not atone for physical sin nor *vice versa.* The ledger of the Almighty is strictly kept, and every one of us has the balance of his operations paid over to him in the end of every minute of his existence. The absolute justice of the system of things is as clear to me as any scientific fact."

It is something to get perfect justice from Nature; for we often get a poor measure of it in human societies, and till the golden age draws near any instalments of it conveyed through the order of our physical life, will always keep the world's heart warm towards a God who ministers an even-handed equity.

But most of us go further than the late Professor

Huxley, and believe with the Psalmist that the world has to thank God for a great deal of mercy as well as justice. A benign secret of recuperation works through the natural, the ethical, and the spiritual life, healing disease, releasing from unclean bondage, and filling the forgiven soul afresh with the smile of God. God brings a more eventful tenderness into the lives of the degraded and the down-trodden than a faultless natural order itself could minister, and the apparent failure of the order through which God's natural attributes are chiefly displayed may be intended to leave space for displays of those spiritual attributes which bring grace and salvation. "The Lord raiseth all that fall, and lifteth up all those that be bowed down." A great and renowned conqueror steps from his chariot to help an old man who has fainted beneath his burden, or to appease the smart of a slave-child who has tripped and bruised himself on the highway. The king ought to abolish the burdens which press upon the aged, and would do well to make highways where it would be impossible for the feeblest pilgrim to stumble and fall. Perhaps so; but, in the meantime, it may be possible through these roughnesses in the country to get a glimpse into the rich humanity of the conqueror, that may be difficult to win when all his plans shall have been perfected. Sufferers so royally helped, find compensation for many disabilities and pains. God ought to have put us into a world where

the way has neither asperities nor pit-falls, where no burdens are put upon weary shoulders, where men cannot faint and fall down. One is tempted to say so. But the painless, symmetrical, perfect world might not give us such a vivid sense of the pity and condescension of God as this world at whose shortcomings men so bitterly complain. Justice rules and justice is mingled with acts of amazing tenderness, and God will not be stinted in the praises He hereafter receives because of the disabilities which obtrude themselves into the passing framework of the world.

The evolutionist tells us that creation is in progress still, and that the old way of viewing it as a finished product is altogether mistaken. Its operations are continuous and did not cease with the last act recorded in the Book of Genesis. If it is a half-finished work, whilst we may still venture to see in it here and there a benign promise, the theory itself ought to condemn impatient and irreligious criticisms of the order of Nature, and of the competence and character of the Divine Being who is behind that order. It is but seemly to wait till the completion of the masterpiece is a few steps nearer before accepting the judgment of a passing mortal upon the whole. No one presumes to pass sentence upon a babe in the cradle, or even upon a growing boy, and say what the sum total of his life-achievements will be. Nature is yet passing through many transformations which

leave us free to anticipate issues of good, the earnest of which already appears, whilst a profane contempt for its apparent shortcomings may prove malicious and ill-founded. Man himself is in the pathway of progress, and under his guidance and sovereign control Nature will be yet further changed.

Upon a tiny island in the South Seas a traveller met a solitary white trader who had been living for a generation amongst the natives; and strange to say the white trader had in his possession a Stradivarius violin. He was but an imperfect master of the precious instrument, and probably his occasional performances amongst the natives would convey very little idea of the worth of the instrument and the skill of its old maker. If the white trader were to die, it is quite possible the old violin would be subjected to many criticisms, and, perhaps, even be treated as old lumber. The virtues of the instrument could only be discovered anew by the development and cultivation of a new gift for music in some genius of the native tribe. Nature, God's wonderful handiwork, at present is like an exquisite instrument in the hands of an imperfectly educated amateur. Man has not learned to handle it aright or to use the wonderful reserves of harmony and delight hidden within its order. Nature, and God in Nature, can only be revealed through man, and a part of God's work is to train man to the skilful mastery of it. It is only then that God's

workmanship will be rightly appreciated, and that God will receive the praise which is due to His name. The revelation of God slowly unfolded through His works, and in man at whose feet those works are placed, will guard the sense of worship in the after generation against extinction or final loss.

The great guarantee for the praises of the after generations is that God is always working, and that He puts into His work that which cannot fail to excite wonder and enlist gratitude, whatever may be the changes in store for men. When Jesus said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work," He finally dismissed the wound-up clock theory of the universe, and declared the Divine immanence in all the changes of Nature and history. God works in every burst of rain, in every tide of sunshine, in the springs of new life which arise within the diseased of either body or soul. Every right impulse in the heart of man is a pulse of his all-enduing life. We must recognise His presence in the growing knowledge and in the wider liberties which come to the nations. It is folly and infatuation to say that God does nothing and that we cannot discern His operations, just as much as it would be folly for the simple barbarian, whose ideas of war are summed up in personal combat, to say that the general who sits in his tent through the long hours of a battle, studying maps and sending off orders to parts of his forces fifteen or twenty

miles away, does nothing and has no share in the victory. It is God's highest glory to act through instruments, as well as to assert Himself in the outward order of the universe. God ever works, and He puts a touch of His own eternity into whatever issues from His touch. His mighty acts are not like the fair ice-palace of a winter carnival, destined to dissolve and disappear in a few short days. His work addresses itself to instincts within us which no changes can attenuate or dissolve. And with the course of the years, men are sure to find their miseries alleviated and their shares in His wonderful gifts enlarged. In spite of the greed and struggle of the castes, the lot of the multitude will be ameliorated and larger numbers of men will come to share in the bounties of Nature, as well as in the blessings of civilisation. If God could cease in His unseen work, men of the future generations might forget to praise Him. That the best to which we reach is immortal demonstrates itself in art, literature, and a hundred other things, and it is pre-eminently true of what God is ever doing in the midst of His people. "One generation shall praise Thy works to another, and shall declare Thy mighty acts."

2. THE PSALMIST'S ASSURANCE IMPLIES FAITH IN THE PERMANENT CAPACITY OF MANKIND TO DISCERN AND APPRECIATE THE WORKS OF GOD. The genius of the chosen race for religion, its strong family cohesion, its political strength and

promise, could inspire no such confidence as that which possessed this writer. In spite of temporary backslidings he recognised the fact that spiritual instincts are indelible. It is faith in God's work in human souls, as well as in His benign rule in Nature and history, which asserts itself in the conviction that "one generation should praise" God's "works to another, and declare" His "mighty acts." The breath of the Eternal is in man, and in spite of folly and wandering, it inspires him to seek the Eternal again. Hunger for God was in the first representative of the race, and it will make itself felt in the last. The children of the future will discover in God an incomparable benefactor, and mute ingratitude is a temper into which our nature cannot finally fall. We keep fresh the memory of those who save us in the time of peril, and extend to us immunity against disease. The builders of the pyramids excite our curiosity, but fail to enlist our homage, for it is difficult to see how we are any the better for what they accomplished. But the names of Harvey and Jenner, Simpson and Lister, have a perennial sweetness that of Cheops can never possess. We do not willingly forget the man who discovers an anæsthetic, or takes an appreciable step towards extirpating a disease which may scourge us and our loved ones. In the growing light of the ages God is more distinctively recognised as a matchless benefactor, the lover of the righteous, and the enemy of the destroyer;

and man will never lose his sense of gratitude to the greatest of all benefactors. Human nature cannot so radically deteriorate.

This certainly is confirmed by the fact that with the course of the generations God's work tends more and more to find for itself a sphere and a centre in the nature of man himself. The order follows that illustrated in the ministry of Jesus Christ—from the miracle without to the miracle within. The mighty acts accomplish themselves on the nearer horizon line of the personal consciousness, and man is at last both the subject and the instrument for their perpetuation. The activities of providence and of grace merge into each other and are mutually interpreted, so that the ascription of praise within a growing Church is always maintained.

Does not the history of the centuries which have sped since the Psalmist's times, and especially of the Christian centuries, justify the boast of our text? A religion which has a living and a working God as the centre of its worship and testimony, cannot fail to perpetuate itself. It is impossible for the mass of men to finally repress the devotional instinct and become rank materialists. The faith and worship of Jehovah fit themselves to all conditions and are indestructible. The race that can acclimatise itself to every zone and accept every form of civilisation without loss of vitality, is the race which Nature herself crowns for future ascen-

dency. The springs of deathless energy are in it. The religion of Jehovah is inexhaustible in its vitality, and without permanent injury can identify itself with every philosophy and every science. Perhaps it does so rather too readily at times and tends to temporary degeneration. It postulates neither an abstract science nor an abstract philosophy; and although it may suffer for a time through accommodating itself to schools which represent impermanent phases of man's intellectual development, and may pass like a moulting bird through periods of sickness and distemper, it cannot perish, because there is within it an indestructible root. It can fit itself to all conditions and accept, when compelled to do so, the genius of every century. When Bishop Samuel Wilberforce made his fatuous attack upon Darwin's *Origin of Species*, and was crushed by Professor Huxley at the Oxford meeting of the British Association, the outlook for the Christian Church seemed dark. But the plausible rhetorician was cast overboard, and many Christian teachers came to accept Darwin's theory, without feeling that their religious faith suffered fatal loss by the change. Faith has drawn a few breaths since those days, and accomplished great things in the world. We are now passing through a crisis equally acute, produced by the conflicts of the Biblical critics, and the problems raised by the ancient monuments. Perhaps there has been exaggeration on both sides, and the pendulum still swings too

violently for an immediate settlement of the questions in debate. But the next generation will accept all that is soberly and honestly proved, and will adjust itself to the new positions without loss of religious vitality. A living and a working God is at the centre of religion, and nothing can undermine or destroy a Christian man's consciousness of God. The need for God, a sense of grateful obligation for all that He does for men in manifold ways, the desire to be loved by an Almighty and overshadowing God, and to give back some humble tribute of love, are indestructible principles in human life.

Have faith in God, in the imperishability of man's instinct for God, in the religious future of your children and your children's children, and in the permanent usefulness of your own best work. The holy tradition which has brought the faintest gleam of sanctity into your life must be handed down. Holiness ought to ramify through all the family tree, although it cannot in the very nature of things flow through organic channels. It springs from the free act of the Spirit of God in putting honour upon a Covenant promise. Praise, gratitude, and a worship well pleasing to God, often do flow in lines of blessed continuity. Only persistent error and culpable unfaithfulness can shift the channels through which the rivers from God's throne flow. All the men of science in the land could not stop the movement of the electric current from Land's End to the Hebrides once the current has started, but

a half-witted miscreant may cut the wires and temporarily divert the next message which may be sent. The law of the God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, and of all the families of the earth, is a law of benign continuity. Let us see to it that we never fall into the criminal folly of breaking up God's order. "One generation shall praise Thy works to another."

We need not distress ourselves with parts of the problem we cannot affect or control. Religion is not decadent, whatever signs of reaction and discouragement we may sometimes discover. The after generations will surpass us in piety and faith, and the hymn of the ages which celebrates God's mighty acts will rise into more triumphant notes. The law of continuity works, although it may, perhaps, seem obscured and suppressed for a time. The personal question is the more important. Are we handing on the holy tradition? Are we doing as much for the coming generations as the past generation did for us, and doing it with as much fervour? Some strings in the instrumentation may be changed, although the music will never cease. God always has His choristers in training. Are we catching up the right keynote, and is the melody in our hearts? Is our vision so purified that we can see all which may be seen of God, and do we tell in accents which never falter that which it is our high privilege to see? The danger is lest in listening to so much contradiction and unbelief we

should distrust our own spiritual senses, and forget what our own eyes have seen and our own hearts have felt. No less than the Psalmist we may have our part in leading the music of the future. "One generation shall praise Thy works to another, and declare Thy mighty acts." "I will speak of the glorious honour of Thy majesty and of Thy wondrous works." It is thus the coming generations are attuned.

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